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["GOOD-BYE," HE SAID, HOARSELY; "PERHAPS THE TIME MAY COME WHEN I SHALL BE ABLE TO FORGIVE YOU."]

THE MISTRESS OF LYWOOD.

—O—

CHAPTER X.

LYWOOD HALL was *en fête*, and even a casual observer, who knew nothing of what was happening, could not fail to have been struck with its gala air. Flags hung from the windows, wreaths of laurel and flowers were above the principal entrance, while triumphal arches and Chinese lanterns in all parts of the grounds bore witness to the general rejoicing that was taking place in honour of the return home of Sir Ralph Lynwood and his young bride.

It is needless to say that much curiosity and gossip had been excited in the neighbourhood at the news of the baronet's marriage, and the comments had not been altogether of a flattering nature with regard to Lady Lynwood.

"An artful young woman, who has married Sir Ralph for the sake of his money and title!" people said, shaking their heads sagely,

and then they spoke in lowered tones of Otho Lynwood, and wondered how he liked having his chances of heirship thus cut off.

If he resented it he contrived to veil his feelings admirably, for it was he who directed all these preparations for welcoming his uncle—he who ordered the bells to be rung, the arches to be erected, and who acted as general superintendent of the whole affair.

"Of course it was a disappointment to me, in a degree," he acknowledged, frankly, when someone ventured to hint that he could hardly have regarded the marriage with unmixed satisfaction; "still, on the whole, I don't know that I am altogether sorry. My uncle's one of the best men in the world, and has behaved like a father to me all my life, so I have surely no right to grudge him happiness, even though it be at my own expense."

This philanthropy raised Captain Lynwood wonderfully in the estimation of the neighbourhood, which unanimously declared he bore his downfall in a most Christian-like manner that deserved every sympathy, for, disguise the facts as you will, there is no disputing that the probable loss of a baronetcy

and fifty thousand a-year is enough to disturb the equanimity of the most unselfish of men!

"I think everything is complete now, Richards," he observed to the butler, throwing a comprehensive glance round. "You have told Mrs. Gibbs to have all the maid-servants in the hall?"

"Yes, sir; and you needn't be afraid but what they'll be there, for they're all dyin' with curiosity to see the new mistress of the hall," responded that functionary, and Otho winced slightly at the last words as if they stung him.

He went to the door and looked out, but as yet there was neither sight nor sound of carriage wheels. It was a lovely afternoon, the sunlight lying in a widespread glory on the leaves, the beds and borders bright with a blossom blaze of crimson and yellow, while the skies above were cloudlessly blue. Lynwood Hall was at its best, and Otho's eyes lingered on its beauties with curious intentness—as if, though accustomed to them all his life, he now saw them in a fresh light.

"A fine heritage—to lose," he muttered to

himself, and added, with an unfathomable smile, "or to win back again."

He had thought long, and pondered deeply over his position before he resolved on the line of conduct he should pursue. Reproaches addressed to Sir Ralph would, he knew, be of no avail; nay, would only injure his case, for the baronet would very naturally affirm that he had a right to please himself, and the fact of his not having married till late in life concerned no one else—and this it would have been impossible to contradict.

The officer's subtle brain revolved many problems, and at last he determined on treating the affair as if it were quite a matter of course, and he had not the shadow of a right to resent it. Accordingly he wrote a letter to his uncle, in which he offered his most sincere congratulations, hoped he would be very happy, and ended by expressing the wish he felt to see his new relative.

The latter statement was no fiction, for he had, indeed, the greatest desire to know what sort of a woman he had to fight, and in spite of his self-possession his heart beat a little faster, and his cheeks grew a little paler, as the pair of eyes, which drew the stately baronets, were pulled up, at the door, and he saw his uncle pleased and smiling sitting by the side of a lady—a lady so young that she looked a mere child, so delicate and ethereal that she reminded one of a snowdrop's fragile petals.

She seemed a little shy and frightened at all the fuss and parade that had been made since their arrival at the station—she had been travelling all day, and fatigue and excitement were beginning to tell on her, and made her look whiter than usual.

"Welcome home, Uncle Ralph—and you, too, Lady Lynwood!" exclaimed Otho, coming forward and assisting them to alight, and he wrung the baronet's hand with the hearty clasp of true friendship, while he respectfully raised that of Adrienne to his lips.

"How her, Otho, kiss her!" exclaimed Sir Ralph, delighted with the spontaneous warmth of this reception. "She is a relative, you know."

"I do not need a second permission," answered the young man; and bending down saluted Adrienne's cheek.

A strange shiver passed through the girl's whole body as he touched her. Was it some presentiment of the evil that in the future should come to her through his agency?

On his arm she passed through the line of servants drawn up in the hall, and headed by the housekeeper, who was very steady in a black silk gown and cap, elaborately adorned with white satin ribbon.

Mrs. Gibbs was far from pleased at the notion of Lynwood having any other mistress than herself; and when she saw how young that mistress was her indignation greatly increased, and she repeated for the hundredth time that "Sir Ralph had made a fool of himself in his old age!"

Unconscious of the unfavourable criticism on the part of the housekeeper, or the admiring regards of the other servants, Adrienne went on to the smallest of the reception rooms, where tea was already set on a small gipsy table.

"I thought Lady Lynwood might be tired, and would like a cup of tea before dinner, so I ordered it," observed Otho.

"Very thoughtful of you," commented the baronet; "only you must address my wife in a less formal manner than 'Lady Lynwood,' or I am sure she will feel hurt."

"Yes, indeed!" acquiesced the young girl.

"Certainly, I will call her what you like," said Otho, pleasantly; "but you must give me proper instructions. It will hardly do to say 'Aunt,' will it?"

Adrienne burst into a little ripple of laughter—as sweet and clear as a peal of silver bells.

"That would be too funny! No, you must call me by my Christian name—Adrienne."

"So be it, and I thank you for your kind

permission. It is such a pretty name—as you pronounce it!"

Presently, after she had finished her tea, the young wife went upstairs to change her dress, and the two gentlemen were thus left alone.

"Well, Otho, what do you think of my bride?" asked Sir Ralph, as the door closed.

"She is charming!" was the enthusiastic answer. "She is as fair and sweet-looking as a flower!"

"Is she not?" exclaimed the baronet, with fond pride; "and, more than that, her soul is as pure and innocent as that of a young child. She is perfectly free from knowledge of the world and its wickedness, and views everything through the mediumship of her own purity. A gentler, tenderer, more guileless nature it was never my fortune to meet. Evil to her is as abhorrent as to the angel!"

"But even angels fall!" muttered Otho to himself, with an evil smile that his mustache hid. Aloud he said—

"I believe you, uncle. I have not much faith in womankind generally, but I will make an exception in favour of this one."

"Don't be cynical, my boy; time enough for that when you get an old man, and the world has shown you its shady side. By-the-bye, Otho, I owe you a good many thanks for your letter, and the way in which you have taken my marriage," he added, his manner growing slightly embarrassed. "I am sure you it has given me a very great deal of pleasure to know how disinterestedly your feelings towards me."

"My dear uncle, what right had I of all men in the world, to complain, when, as a matter of fact, I owe everything to you?"

"I know, I know; but some people would have looked at the matter differently—especially as I had led you to suppose it was my intention never to marry—see, indeed, in your hat, you see, Otho, even old men are not proof against Cupid's power, and I believe I am as much in love as a boy of seventeen or eighteen."

"Old idiot!" was Otho's mental comment on this confession; but he smiled pleasantly in his uncle's face, as if in gentle indulgence of an amiable weakness. "Well, you have a very fair excuse," he observed, in answer.

"I cannot make out how it is I was so well satisfied with single blessedness," went on the baronet. "Most decidedly those men are happiest who have given hostages to fortune in the shape of wife and children. It would have been better had I married earlier; but I am not the old to look forward to seeing sons and daughters grow up at my side."

Otho turned away, and looked through the window; and it struck Sir Ralph that his speech was rather wanting in tact at that precise juncture.

Luckily, the pause that ensued was broken by the entrance of Adrienne, who had changed her travelling dress for one of white cashmere, made quite simply, in straight folds that fell in graceful lines round her slender young form, and suited her beauty to perfection.

"You only want a halo to make you look like a mediæval saint!" exclaimed Otho, gaily; and immediately afterwards the butler announced that dinner was served, and they all adjourned to the dining-room—a stately apartment panelled in oak and hung round with family portraits.

"How do you like your rooms?" asked Otho of Adrienne, when they were seated.

"They are charming—so light and fresh and elegant!" she answered, with the childish enthusiasm that was perfectly natural to her.

He bowed and looked pleased.

"I am very glad they meet with your approval. I did not know your taste, so I had to exercise a considerable amount of discretion in selecting the furniture."

"Did you select it, Otho?" asked Sir Ralph.

"Yes. Mrs. Gibbs came to me in great distress, saying you had sent orders to get the suite of rooms in the west wing ready for Lady Lynwood's occupation, and as they required

a great many alterations to make them decent she was at her wits' end, so I undertook the responsibility myself."

"Which was more than good of you. I'm sure I don't know how we can thank you for the trouble you have taken in our home-coming."

"That task repaid itself," said the officer, gallantly, and glancing at Lady Lynwood, in order to point his compliment.

"Now tell me what has been happening since I have been away," said Sir Ralph, more pleased than ever with his nephew's conduct. "You must have quite an accumulation of gossip."

"I have heard very little—but then you must remember I have only been here a week."

"Still, you can learn a good deal in a week."

"Perhaps I have been remiss in seeking intelligence then, for certainly I know very little. By-the-bye, there is one piece of news, now I come to think—Nathalie Egerton is engaged."

"Pretty Nathalie engaged! Well, I suppose that is not a matter for surprise. But who is the lucky man?"

"A Mr. Farquhar."

"What Farquhar?" inquired the baronet, knitting his brows.

"He is a financier, and a very rich man; but people down here are inclined to look coldly on the match, which, they say, is one of convenience only."

"I am sure I hope not, for Nathalie is one of the most charming girls I know, and certainly deserves a happy future."

"She will probably enjoy a happy one," observed Otho, with a cynical laugh. "Did I not tell you this man was very rich, and will not any woman sell herself for the wealth that carries her into the paradise of jewels and fine clothes and opera-boxes and admiration?"

Sir Ralph frowned at the disclosure at the speech, which he did not answer. He was inclined to think Otho rather wanting in tact now.

"Has her brother come home yet?" he asked, presently.

"What, Lionel? No, he was to have been home some time ago, but he contrived to fall down in Brussels, and broke his leg, so he has been a prisoner there ever since. I believe, however, they expect him back immediately."

"What name did you say?" demanded Adrienne, in a tremulous voice.

"Lionel Egerton. Do you know him?"

She coloured all over her delicate face, and both men regarded her so curiously and so intently that her embarrassment naturally increased.

"No, that is, yes. I have met him, at least," she stammered, incoherently, and wondering whether they would think she had done a very heinous thing in permitting him to escort her when he had not been introduced to her.

"Where did you meet him?" asked her husband, with some asperity.

"In Brussels."

"At your school?"

"Oh, no! He rendered me a service once. I will tell you about it some other time, not now," she answered hastily, and after this Sir Ralph could not press her.

Nevertheless, the incident was not forgotten either by him or his nephew, and, trivial as it was, it was yet destined to make an indelible impression on both their memories.

CHAPTER XL.

The next few days were mostly taken up in receiving and entertaining the visitors who flocked to Lynwood Hall, anxious to see the young mistress, and discover what manner of woman this "old man's darling" was.

The verdict they passed was very favourable. Although Adrienne had seen nothing of the world, and knew nothing of fashionable manners, she had a quiet, unconscious dignity

that was innate, and which supplied the place of experience.

People were charmed with her delicate, flower-like face, and the sweet tranquillity of her smile, and whatever mercenary motives they might formerly have imputed to her for consenting to marry a man old enough to be her father, they now declared she had been actuated by no other consideration than her affection for Sir Ralph.

And, indeed, the young girl was very happy at this period. For the first time in her life she enjoyed perfect liberty of action, and she revelled in it like a bird, which has suddenly been set free from the narrow limits of a cage, and can fly whithersoever he will in the wide air of Heaven.

She was surrounded by every luxury Sir Ralph's fondness could suggest, and she enjoyed the pretty and tasteful objects lavished upon her with the enjoyment of a young and artistic soul, to which their possession is a novelty. The strangeness of her position soon wore away, and she quickly grew accustomed to hearing herself called "my lady," and to the feeling that she was the person of most importance in the household—one whose will was law, and whose slightest caprice must be obeyed.

Some characters might have been spoiled by the change; but here was so utterly sweet and unselfish, so entirely devoid of the grosser elements, that the only result of her new dignities was a girlish delight and happiness, beneath whose influence her nature expanded like that of a flower which has been kept in the dark and is suddenly brought into the sunshine.

It was pretty to see her running about the house in her white dress, and with her shining hair falling in a golden cloud over her shoulders, for Sir Ralph would not permit her to bind it up, which he said would hide its beauty. He had bought her a little carriage and pair of ponies, and these she was never tired of driving about, while her husband sat at her side, looking at her with admiring eyes that never wearied of watching her sweet, changing face.

Her affection for him was very true, very sincere; and it was that of a child for a parent, rather than a wife for her husband, she was too innocent to know the difference.

Frequently Otho would accompany her in her walks and drives, and on these occasions nothing could exceed the assiduity with which he endeavoured to amuse her. He was an agreeable companion, for, of course, he knew the neighbourhood thoroughly, and was able to point out to her all the spots of interest, and give her the history of the county families, and Adrienne was very grateful for his kindness and the efforts he made for her pleasure.

"I am sure I do not know why you should take so much trouble for me," she said to him once, with naive simplicity.

"I assure you your society is a great pleasure to me," he immediately replied. "All my life I have wished for a sister, and you, in some measure, supply the place of one towards me."

"Do I? I am very glad."

"A female friend is a great boon to any man," he went on, with his unfathomable smile, "and in the present state of society, it is impossible for two members of opposite sexes to be friends unless they are relatives."

"Is it?" she said, surprisedly. "I do not see why it should be impossible."

"Then you believe in platonic affection?"

"Certainly I do. If people have tastes and sympathies in common I do not understand why they should be debarred from each other's companionship because they happen to belong to different sexes."

Otho shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see why they should either, but you see the world has put its veto on such friendships."

"Then defy the world!"

He laughed again, but a strange gleam shot into his eyes. He had set himself the task of

gauging the character of his uncle's wife, and each revelation was carefully treasured up in his memory for future use. Simple and innocent as she appeared, it was yet not the simplicity of weakness, and there were depths in her nature that had never yet been sounded, and of whose existence she herself was ignorant. She had infinite capabilities of love, of suffering, and of devotion, but these forces yet slumbered, waiting for the magic of an enchanter's wand to wake them into life.

Nathalie Egerton had been one of the first to call at Lynwood Hall, and she and Adrienne had immediately taken a great fancy to each other. The latter had said nothing of her meeting with Lionel, and had listened attentively, but without remark, when Nathalie told her they expected him home on the following day.

He really came this time, in spite of his sister's declaration that after so many disappointments she would not believe in his presence until she actually felt his arms round her.

"I was growing quite hopeless. You have been coming so many times, and have disappointed us at the last moment," she said, when the first greetings were over, and brother and sister sat together on the couch, his arm twined fondly about her waist, while his eyes gazed tenderly into hers.

"It was not my fault, my broken bones refused to join, and the doctors said unless I kept myself quiet I might go limping about the world for the rest of my days," he said; "and as that was a contingency I did not wish to face, I thought I had better make the best of a bad job and stay where I was. I need not say how anxiously I was looking forward to seeing you after this long time," he added, kissing her.

"It is a long time; is it not?" And the years have improved you wonderfully. Do you find me much altered?"

"Yes; you were a child when I left, you are a beautiful woman now. But it seems to me Nathalie, you are pale and thin, and you look as if you were very much worried!"

A bright colour leapt to her cheeks, and faded as suddenly.

It was true; she felt more than worried, but it was far from her desire that he should guess the reason of her trouble.

She played restlessly with a ring she wore on the third finger of her left hand, and this, at length, attracted his attention, and he bent down to look at it.

"What splendid opals!" he exclaimed. "But you should not wear them—they are unlucky for people not born in October."

"Are they? Fortunately I am not superstitious."

"But what is the meaning of this ring, Nathalie? Are you engaged?"

She answered in the affirmative, without raising her eyes.

"And you never told me!" he said, reproachfully.

"I have had no opportunity of doing so, for the engagement is quite recent," she answered, hastily, and then told him the name of her fiancé, but said nothing of the position in which he stood towards her father.

In spite of all her efforts to conceal it, there was a certain restraint in her manner as she spoke of her betrothal that Lionel was quick to observe.

He fancied there must be some mystery, but whatever it was, she clearly wished him kept in ignorance, and so he made no further remark beyond congratulating her, and wishing her all future happiness.

"You cannot think what a delight it is to me to be at home once more," he said, as he went to the window and looked out, while she joined him and leaned on his shoulder. "In my dreams, when I was away, I so often saw the old house and the avenue leading up to it, with the sunlight playing on the leaves. Ah, Nathalie! there is no place like home!"

"But there are very few homes as beautiful as ours, Lionel."

"No; it is indeed a place to be proud of!" he answered, while his eyes rested fondly on the velvet, smooth lawns, where a couple of stately peacocks were sunning themselves, and then travelled onwards to the park, with its miniature forests of bracken. "I would not part with King's Dene for an Emperor's ransom!"

She looked at him with strange intentness. "And you would think no sacrifice too great to retain it?"

"None. Why, it has been in our family as long that to part with it would be sacrilege—desecration. I would rather lose twenty years of my life than my heritage. But why do you suggest such a thing?" he asked, playfully. "Surely there is no fear of its being wrested from us?"

"No fear of it—now," she said, with a little catching of the breath; and he wondered at the expression her face wore as she spoke the words; it reminded him of the picture of a martyr he had once seen, and that had impressed him strongly with a sense of the "faithfulness unto death" it was intended to convey.

Nathalie turned quickly from the window, so that he should have no further opportunity of studying her features; and as she did so, she said to herself—

"My sacrifice has not been in vain!"

There was no lack of subjects of conversation between brother and sister; each had much to tell the other, and it seemed as if their confidences would never end.

"And are you come back quite heartwhole?" asked Nathalie, playfully.

"Quite," he answered; but she fancied a shade of red showed in his bronzed complexion.

"Do you mean to tell me you have been away all these years and not fallen in love?"

"Oh, for that matter, I have fallen in love half-a-dozen times or more, but the awkward part is, I have fallen out again as readily," he said, laughing. "I fancy my ideal woman must be a very exalted one; at all events, I have not met her yet."

"What is she like—the ideal?"

He paused a moment, as if conjuring up a mental vision before he answered.

"She must be rather tall, rather slight, have golden hair, and eyes the colour of pansies; she must be gentle, gracious, very womanly; innocent and yet intelligent, tender but not weak, and, above everything, she must have a soft voice, that 'most excellent thing in a woman!'"

Nathalie laughed.

"You are, indeed, modest in your requirements; and such being your standard, I am not much surprised that it has never been reached—it never could be."

"Yes," he said, dreamily, and speaking more to himself than her, "there is such a woman in the world—I have seen her."

"Where?"

The answer that trembled on his lips died there unspoken. He suddenly seemed to remember himself.

"In a far-off land; but she is a dream, a vision, an airy, unsubstantial nothing!" he said, a strange intonation in his voice, despite its affected gaiety. The memory, whatever it might be, was too sacred to be spoken of, even to his sister; and, as if to evade a further discussion of it, he went towards the door. "I am going to my father—will you come?"

"No; I have some household affairs to see to. Do not forget that I have promised to take you with me to Lynwood Hall to-morrow night. Sir Ralph is most anxious to see you."

"My respect for Sir Ralph is not what it used to be. I had no idea he would ever make such a fool of himself as to marry a young wife."

"Wait until you have seen her, and then, perhaps, you'll understand it better," retorted his sister, who entertained a great admiration for Adrienne—the admiration of one handsome woman for another.

Lionel shrugged his shoulders indifferently. He was not in the least anxious to see her; and, in point of fact, if he thought of her at all it was as an intriguing woman, who, for the sake of his wealth, had entangled the baronet in her toils.

CHAPTER XII.

LYNNWOOD HALL was lighted up from basement to garret, and every five minutes carriages rolled up the approach, deposited their burdens, and drove away to give place to others.

The Egertons' conveyance was a lumbering old family coach, that had most decidedly seen better days, but which, if ponderous, was yet very comfortable, and, more than that, had a certain grandeur about it that may have been partially due to the coat-of-arms blazoned on its panels, and partly to its size.

No more distinguished-looking visitors than Nathalie and Lionel Egerton had yet arrived, and as they entered the room she, in trailing skirts of amber brocade, that had been her mother's, and he in plain evening dress, a slight murmur of admiration was audible. They did, indeed, make a handsome couple, but they were both either serenely unconscious of, or supremely indifferent to, the fact.

Adrienne, as they came up, had her back to them, having turned round to speak to someone, so it was only when they were close to her that she saw them.

A sudden light came in her eye, a bright smile trembled on her lips, and her colour deepened perceptibly as she met Egerton's gaze of utter surprise.

"Lady Lynwood, may I introduce my brother to you?" said Nathalie.

"There is no necessity for an introduction, Miss Egerton; we have met before," she replied, and held out her hand, which Lionel took, with a few words indicative of his astonishment.

"But where have you and Lady Lynwood met?" inquired Nathalie, after she had spoken to Otho, who was standing by the young wife's side, and watching this little scene with great interest.

"In Brussels," she responded, briefly, and did not think it worth while to mention under what circumstances their meeting had taken place.

"Quite a pleasant little surprise for you both," observed Otho, and Adrienne answered innocently,—

"Indeed, yes."

After Lionel had spoken to Sir Ralph, and greeted a few other old friends, he contrived to wander off into a small reception-room at the end of the suite, where he found himself alone. This was what he wanted, for he was so entirely taken aback by the discovery of Lady Lynwood's identity that at first he actually failed to realise it. He had known she had left Brussels, for he had watched the school several days when it went for its daily walk on the Avenue Louise, and observed she was not there; but it never entered his wildest dreams to conceive that they should meet again here.

The impression she had made on him was a curious one, and quite unique in his experience of women. She was unlike anyone else he had ever met; her gentle serenity, the innocent naivete that was not childishness, and the simple candour which, even his short acquaintance had enabled him to see, was perfectly natural to her, had made him set her on a pedestal somewhat higher than he had ever given to the rest of her sex; and so firmly had he held to this idea of her superiority that even now he would not drag her down to the common level, although he had been inclined to pronounce a harsh judgment on the girl who had become Sir Ralph Lynwood's wife.

"There are circumstances in the case that I do not understand, but I would stake my life she was actuated by no unworthy motive," he said to himself; and then, after a little while, he went back to the drawing-room and

stood in a corner, unconscious of how keenly he was watching her.

Every detail of her appearance impressed itself on his memory. She was dressed in some very pale pink material—hardly pink, indeed, but white, in which a faint roseate hue was visible—and in her hair and bosom nestled tuberoses. Nothing could exceed the delicate loveliness of the picture she made, and the charm was heightened by her exquisitely tranquil grace.

"What do you think of my uncle's wife?" asked Otho Lynwood, joining him in his corner.

Lionel started slightly at the question.

"I think her lovely, as other people must also think her," he answered.

Otho raised his eyebrows superciliously.

"Yes, she is pretty enough, but for my part I prefer a little more colour—she is too like a narcissus, or one of those tuberoses in her hair. Don't you think a dash of red in her cheeks would improve her?"

"No, I do not—you might as well try to improve a lily with rouge. She is as perfect as a woman can ever hope to be."

"You are enthusiastic," observed Lynwood, with a slight laugh; "I did not know you were such a connoisseur of female charms."

"I never professed to be, but I have artistic instincts, and Lady Lynwood satisfies them."

"Are you going to stay at King's Dene long?" asked the officer, with an abrupt change of subject.

"Yes, I expect so. You see, it is a good while since I have been at home, so I shan't want to leave it in a hurry."

"No, of course not. Well, I hope I shall see a good deal of you, for I am going to be here some time, and occasionally I find the hours hang a little heavily. The country is all very well in its way, but it's such a deucedly monotonous way after one has been accustomed to town life. Are you fond of tennis?"

"Yes, very."

"That's a good thing, for down here people think of nothing else in the way of amusement. Sir Ralph has an exceptionally good lawn, which I find a great resource. He has altered the grounds considerably since you went away."

"Has he? They used to be very pretty, I remember."

"They are still prettier now. Come over in the morning, and I will take you round the estate and show you the improvements."

"Thanks, I shall be very happy," responded Lionel, marvelling slightly at this cordiality on the part of Otho.

They had known each other from boyhood, but it can hardly be said they had ever been friends, for there were few sympathies or congenial tastes between them, and, as a consequence, they had not seen very much of each other.

But now Lynwood seemed determine to alter the former state of things, for his manner became warm and friendly, and, contrary to his usual custom with men, he even exerted himself to make himself agreeable to Lionel—although not in such a marked way as to arouse the latter's suspicions of any ulterior motive.

Meanwhile, in another part of the room, a different scene was being enacted. Nathalie had been listlessly turning over some photographic views, when she heard her name pronounced, and, looking up, beheld Hugh Cleveland at her side.

Every vestige of colour fled from her cheek, and she made a startled movement, as if she would have run away, but he put his hand on her wrist, and prevented her.

"You shall not escape me this time," he said, in a low, fierce whisper; "I have tried long enough and hard enough to see you, and have hitherto been baffled, but I shall not let this opportunity slip."

"Hush!" she said, regaining her composure, although her voice trembled; "for Heaven's sake do not make a scene—remember

how many people there are about who will notice us."

"If you are afraid of that, come out on the terrace; the night is warm, so there will be nothing singular in the proceeding," he returned, doggedly; "I am determined to speak to you, but it is for you to decide how and where."

She hesitated a moment, then rose and took his arm. She was observant enough to see that he was quite resolved to carry his point, and that if she did not acquiesce in his proposal he would say what he had to say in the room, and attention would probably be attracted towards them; she therefore thought it wiser to fall in with his first suggestion, and so they passed through the open French windows on to the terrace.

No one else was there, which was strange, as the night was an exceptionally lovely one. The moon was almost at her full, and under the influence of her beams a silver glamour seemed to lie over the landscape. From the gardens below came subtle wafts of perfume, and no sound broke the stillness but the faint rustling of the glossy laurel leaves, as a gentle wind crept in amongst them.

Nathalie, standing there in her gold-coloured skirts, and with a black lace mantilla twisted round her shoulders—through whose meshes the shoulders themselves shone like polished ivory—looked even more queenly than usual, and Cleveland's eyes involuntarily softened as he gazed at her.

"I have had a hard battle with my pride, but love has conquered," he said, after a pause, and with a curious bitterness in his voice; "perhaps you will think it cowardly of me to come to you again after your father's rejection of my suit, followed by the letter in which you confirmed it; but somehow, and in spite of that letter, I could not believe your affection had died so soon, and I fancied you might be under some coercion which was forcing you to act contrary to your wishes. Was I right, Nathalie?"

She did not reply immediately, but looked away from him across the moonlit lawns. When she spoke her voice was very low.

"I was alone when I wrote that letter, and no one dictated it but myself. I told you it was best for us to part—why cannot you accept my decision?"

"Because happiness and I won't part company so easily. Good Heavens, how calmly you speak—as if the question were a trivial one, instead of being a matter of life or death!" he exclaimed, between his set teeth. "I have heard that women are fickle—that their fancies are light as wind, and change equally easily; but I never believed it—I cannot believe it now, although your own words condemn you. Ah! Nathalie, think of what you say, what you do, and then tell me there is some error, some mistake, and that you are still my own true love!"

In his voice, his manner, there was a passion which told its own tale, and who shall measure the strength of the temptation Nathalie felt to cast herself on his breast, and let all other considerations vanish before the one great one of justifying his faith?

Her heart was beating as though it would burst all barriers in its efforts to get free; her blood coursed through her veins with a swift vitality, born of the excitation of his presence—she would have given ten years of her life just to lie once more in his arms and see his loveliest eyes gazing down into hers, as they had gazed but a few short weeks ago; but a vision of her father's careworn face rose up before her, the words Lionel had spoken the preceding morning rang in her ears, and her resolve to persevere in her sacrifice, even to the bitter end, grew strong once more.

She dared not tell him of the reasons that actuated her conduct, for if he had guessed them, he would have combated them with all his strength, and her battle would have to be fought all over again.

It was better to let him think her false, and then his pain at her loss would be less.

"There is no mistake," she said, clearly and incisively, "what I wrote to you I am ready to repeat, namely, that it is quite impossible I can ever marry you."

"But, why not, Nathalie—why not? Cannot you give me some reason?"

"No! it is sufficient to state the fact."

"Sufficient for you, perhaps, but not for me. It cannot be my poverty, for when I told you I loved you, and spoke to you of it, you said it made no difference to you, and, indeed, I believed you too grand and high-minded to be affected by it; and yet, I can think of nothing else. That your father should have objected to me as a suitor for your hand is perfectly comprehensible, although he need not have spoken to me in the way he did; but I fancied that even in the face of his opposition you would have been firm, and have waited until I could claim you."

Poor Nathalie! How willing—more than willing, she would have been to do so, if fate had not interposed such a barrier between them! But this she could not tell him, and so she remained silent.

"I had such faith in you," he went on, "such faith that I would have staked my life on your constancy in perfect confidence as to the issue. Think, then, how hard it is to believe myself mistaken. Is it not difficult for me to imagine that the girl I held in my arms such a little while ago—the girl whose sweet lips I kissed, and who told me that she loved me and would be true to me, let what would betide—is the same who says to me now that all is over between us, and we must part?"

"Difficult it may be, but it is true—why will you not accept it as a fact and leave me?" she cried, passionately, her anguish under the torture of his words, almost more than she could bear.

"Why will I not? Because it seems to me I know you better than you do yourself, Nathalie." He seized both her hands, and stood in front of her, so that she was forced to look at him. "Women may change in the course of months, or years, but they do not in a single day, like you did, unless pressure is brought to bear upon them. I tell you, I will not give you up—I will hold you true to your promise, so long as there is no actual barrier between us!"

"But there is," she cried out, in desperation, and she threw forward her left hand, and pointed to the circlet of opals that adorned the third finger.

He staggered back as if he had been shot.

"What does that mean?" he asked, hoarsely.

"It means I am betrothed to another man—it means that in the course of a few weeks I shall be his wife!" she answered, the words falling heavily from her lips, while the opals gleamed balefully in the moonlight.

Hugh put his hand to his forehead, and drew a long, deep breath.

"Who is the man?" he asked, in ominously low voice.

"Gilbert Farquhar."

"He who was talking to you at the window when I came from your father's study? If it had not been for his presence I should have sought you, and spoken to you there and then." He paused for a few minutes, his breath coming very fast while he looked at her, then he said, "I know Farquhar by name; he is a very rich man, and he will be able to give his wife all the luxuries even a woman could wish—carriages and horses, and cashmeres and diamonds, while I could only have given her love! How could I expect to win, with him for a rival? The race was not fair, I started too heavily handicapped, and the result might have been foretold from the beginning. Nevertheless, I staked my all, and lost." His tone changed again—became full of harsh, concentrated passion. "Do you know what you have done, Nathalie Egerton? You have committed murder, as foul as if you had stabbed me with a dagger, for you have killed all that was bright in my life—all that made it worth living; you have lured me on to

love you for the sake of adding one more victim to your list of conquests, and then thrown me aside like a worn-out glove—and this with no pity, no remorse. I believed in womanhood as something high, and pure, and noble; but you have degraded my idea, and robbed me of my belief, and now I see your sex as they are, vain—selfish, heartless, and ready to be bought or sold, as the case may be, for so many pieces of gold. I have been blind, but now my eyes are open, and never again will the same delusion have power to deceive me. Perhaps you have done me a service, I do not know; only I would give half my life to have my blindness back again, and the happiness it brought me!"

The last words seemed wrung from him by some involuntary power he found it impossible to withstand, and as he spoke them he turned and looked at her standing there, with the roses and passion flowers above her head, and her yellow silks lying on the marbles of the terrace, a picture that haunted him for many a long day.

"Good-bye," he said, hoarsely, "perhaps the time may come when I shall be able to forgive you; I cannot now."

And then he turned away and left her; going through the gardens on his way home, heedless of the comments and conjectures this unceremonious leavetaking might excite; while she, with a low cry, like that of an animal in dire extremity, slipped down to the ground, and lay there, her eyes closed, her face white as the moonlight.

And here Lionel, who had come to look for her, found her ten minutes afterwards; for the first time in her life, she who prided herself on her strength of nerves and constitution, had been deserted by both, and had fainted.

(To be continued.)

SINNED AGAINST.

CHAPTER XIV.—(continued.)

Long ago—and it seemed long ago to her—May had told Bertram Danvers she should never love anyone as he did her.

Alas! before Stuart Lord St. John had been a fortnight at the Dell she had learned to care for him as her own life.

She had solved the question that puzzled her—he had not remembered that incident which brought back so much pain to her; he had no notion that the girl he knew as May Anstruther was the child he had saved from misery.

That point once solved, May was at her ease with him, and enjoyed his society.

The General never commented on his intimacy with Stuart. Mrs. Anstruther proved herself the easiest and most accommodating of chaperones. May and Lord St. John rode together; together they took brisk walks across the bleak country roads; they sang duets and read Tennyson in company; there were chats in the gloaming, and consultations in the conservatory; in short, never had man and woman been given more opportunities for falling in love with each other than those accorded to Lord St. John and May when the nobleman came a guest to the Dell!

General Anstruther looked on well pleased; it was his darling scheme that these two should be made one, and he was delighted when he saw how they sought each other's society.

There was nothing lover-like in their conduct, only they seemed to have an instinctive sympathy for each other.

Again and again May longed to tell Lord St. John she was the girl he had seen at Bertram Danvers's side—again and again she kept silent for very shame.

If she had only spoken out when she first saw him at the Dell how much easier it would have been! To speak now, after these weeks of silence, would be well-nigh impossible.

And then the tidings came Lord St. John

was going away. His visit had been prolonged to nearly a month, and yet the news of his departure came on May like a thunderclap.

All that morning she avoided him steadily. He hardly caught sight of her till lunch, and then she again vanished, but Stuart did not mean to lose his last day of her society, and so he asked Mrs. Anstruther boldly to send May to come and ride with him.

Mrs. Anstruther came back, bearing her niece's message,—

"She was very sorry, but it was too cold, and she had a headache."

"Where is she?"

"In the music-room. Don't persuade her, Stuart; she looks quite tired and ill."

"I have no intention of persuading her."

But he went upstairs to the music-room, nevertheless, and found May looking very white and weary in an easy-chair by the fire.

"Don't you think you are treating me very badly?" asked Stuart, gravely.

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"It is so cold," shivering, "I could not ride."

"But you could be visible, instead of spiriting yourself away like a fairy or a changeling. I have hardly seen you to-day."

"I have been busy."

"What have you been doing?"

But she seemed in no hurry to tell him.

"My last day and all, too!"

She kept silent.

"Perhaps you are glad I am going? Are you, May?"

"No."

"Turn round and look at me. Do you know you have been crying?"

"I haven't."

"I think you have. May, are you very fond of the Dell?"

"Yes."

"Do you think you could bear to leave it?"

She had no suspicion of his meaning. By a supreme effort of his will Stuart had controlled his eagerness. His voice was calm—almost stern. One would have thought him but an indifferent wooer. It was difficult to guess the passionate longing hidden beneath his quiet, every-day manner.

May looked into the fire.

"Yes, I think so. But is grandpapa really thinking of leaving the Dell? I know he has talked of it, but—"

"I meant would you go without him? Child, there are many years between us, and I cannot woo you as a younger man might, but, May, I love you truly! Would you be content to put your hand in mine, and let us go down life's pathway together?"

Deep silence!

She had never hoped for this. She loved him—oh, yes, she loved him more than life! but she had never thought he cared for her like this.

And then there was that dreadful secret! How could she tell him? After all, must she tell him? It had not been her fault, and the past was past. Oh, why must Bertram Danvers stand like a great barrier between her and happiness! Oh, why must her own hand push from her lips the cup of joy!

Stuart took her hand in his.

"I am waiting for your answer, child."

Still no entreating, no persuasion; still that calm, firm tone, and she loved him the better. No true woman ever really loves a man whose will is weak.

"Would it make you happy?"

He told her simply,—

"Yes."

"You know," said May, huskily, "I am not really your uncle's grandchild. I had been poor all my life. I lived in a tiny house till I met him."

"That doesn't matter. May, I want your present and your future, not your past, dear."

"Surely she will tell me now," he thought

for something whispered to him that their future would be the fairer if once mention was made between them of Bertram Duncans. But May clasped that trouble with the past, and Stuart had said he did not want her past.

"If you want me really," she whispered in his ear, "I will be your wife; and you will try, won't you, to make me better?"

"You don't need any making better. May, is it really so? Are you going to be my own? Do you love me, child?"

She did not answer him, but she hid her face on his shoulder, and he was satisfied.

Later on it came to him with an awful pain that after all she had merely promised to be his wife. She had never said she loved him. The engagement was a settled thing, the wedding was fixed for January, and congratulations flooded in.

Then came a time which May never rightly understood. She saw but little of her fiancé. He was busy in his profession, and could find little time to run down, and when he was at the Doll dressmakers and milliners always seemed to claim her attention. But at last the wedding morning came, and clad in rich white silk, the girl he had rescued from life-long misery stood at Stuart's side, and vowed to devote that life he had saved from sorrow to him.

Then a little later, in the vestry, with the winter sunshine falling on her hair, she signed for the last time the name the General had legally given her, and which she had borne for such a short time—"May Anstruther."

It was over; they were married. Leaning on her husband's arm May passed down the aisle; then as he placed her in the carriage a dull, sharp pain seized her. She had put it out of her own power now to tell him of the past. What if he discovered it for himself? At that thought, at the vision of his anger, his disappointment and distress, Lady St. John shivered as one struck by a sudden chill; and Stuart drew her head down to rest on his shoulder, and little guessing the pain at her heart, called her his own, his love, his wife!

His wife she must be always. "Alas, alas!" thought May; "when he knew all would she continue his love?"

CHAPTER XV.

Mrs. Russell and her ward, Miss St. John, did not find prosperity bringing them quite all the happiness they had expected. It was very pleasant to be an heiress; to own a mansion in Park-lane, an estate in the country, and more money than she knew how to spend, but even these advantages could not bring perfect happiness in their train.

The girl who had been known as Margaret Russell was haunted by two phantoms ever in her path. The two she had supplanted seemed always rising up to torture her fancy in the silent hours of the night. She would see the fair face of Alix, and hear the sweet voice pleading for the generosity which should save her from misery; and then at other times the little Cinderella of Mackstone would appear to torment her supposed cousin.

With these two spectres ever haunting her life could not be all brightness for Margaret.

"You had much better marry and settle down," Mrs. Russell would say to her charge. "Take my word for it, Meg, you will never feel easy until you have a husband to protect you."

"Or to protect my money?" asked the heiress, bitterly. "Which do you mean?"

Mrs. Russell sighed. Her young companion was at times strangely unmanageable.

"If only you would marry Lord St. John!"

Meg started.

"He has not the slightest intention of asking me, and it is a good thing, for I detest him!"

"He would be a dangerous enemy. Meg, do be careful not to offend him!"

"I don't care what he thinks of us."

"But if he discovered the truth?"

The heiress shrugged her shoulders.

"It is not likely. And if he did?"

"It would be transportation."

"Perhaps."

"You take it coolly."

"You forget," said the girl, with perfect sang-froid, "the punishment would not touch me."

"Not touch you?"

"Assuredly not. You have asserted I was confided to your care as a baby. The sternest judge could hardly punish me for not contradicting you. You have represented me as the heiress of the St. Johns. It is not my fault, surely, if I was deceived by your representations."

"Then you would let the weight of disgrace fall on me?"

"Don't get angry. I don't think there's any fear of detection; but if it came, it would, of course, fall on you."

"Margaret!"

"It is quite true."

"Have you no heart?" said Mrs. Russell, forgetting how ardently she had striven to repress all feelings in her child. "Meg, I am your mother, and I don't believe you have one grain of love for me."

"You are not my mother. You forget I am the daughter of Lord St. John's first wife. The girl who ran away last spring was your child."

"At any rate, she had more heart than you," cried Mrs. Russell, fairly besides herself with indignation. "I have a great mind to go to Stuart St. John and tell him the truth."

"Do, if you have a fancy for transportation."

"You had better not try me too far."

"I have no wish to try you, none at all. I introduce you to all my friends, I take you everywhere I go myself, I treat you as a friend and equal; what more can you expect? Remember you yourself made it impossible for me to behave to you as a mother."

Mrs. Russell sighed, and said no more.

After all, though she had sinned, the crime had been for Meg, and Meg was repaying her with the deepest ingratitude. Poor woman, her sins brought her little reward.

Miss St. John had now taken up her abode in the Park-lane mansion. True, London was emptying fast, but there were plenty of people left to be friends with the young heiress. Among the first to call on her was Lady Manners.

"You will want a chaperone," said the woman of the world, suavely; "and it suits me to go into society with anyone rich enough to pay my expenses. I fancy we can be very useful to each other, my dear, and I don't see why we should be enemies because my son married your half-sister."

It dawned on Margaret with a rush that this was just the guardian she needed—a matron of rank and fashion, with no daughters of her own to chaperone, and whose poverty would make her glad to befriend a rich if unknown heiress.

"I am glad you take such a sensible view of things," she said, coldly. "I fancy Sir Clarence would not agree with you, however."

"Clarence is infatuated. It really is absurd what he could see in Alix to wreck his whole future for her childish face."

Margaret remembered another childish face, but so very unlike Alix's; she wondered what the only heart she had ever coveted could have seen in May to pour out his love upon her.

"Where is Sir Clarence now?"

"In Brussels. My brother is ambassador there, and Clarence intends to go in for diplomacy."

"Ah, his grief was short enough."

"No," said Lady Manners, abruptly, "he is not cured of his infatuation. It's my belief he would give years from his own life to bring back his wife."

"Then you believe she is dead," and, despite her self-command, Margaret shivered from head to foot.

"I am quite sure of it."

"But she was never found."

Lady Manners threw up her hands.

"My dear Miss St. John, that is exactly how Clarence talked for three weeks after her loss. He sought her far and wide. He set one of the first detectives in London on her track. For three weeks I say, he never rested night or day. His desire to find Alix seemed one consuming passion."

"He must have loved her."

"I suppose so."

Lady Manners hated truth as though it were a personal wrong, he should have done so.

"I think there ought to be a law to prevent young men falling in love with portionless girls. Well, at any rate, he seemed as one distracted. I hardly saw him. He was always about with your kinsman, Lord St. John, a most objectionable young man, my dear."

"I quite agree with you."

"Well at the end of the third week Clarence came home, and told me he was going to Belgium Island. It seemed so sudden and incredible. I urged on him that his wife's death obviated all necessity for exertion on his part; that after a few months' retirement he could re-enter society, and retrieve his fortune by a more prudent device."

"And he refused?"

"Positively!"

"How distressing for you."

"Mother," he said, solemnly, "nothing will convince me of my wife's death. Until I stand before her grave, and read her name upon the headstone, I shall believe that Alix is alive."

"How ridiculous!"

"Utterly. I remonstrated with him; I argued that his one chance of finding her was in England, but he declared he must go. 'I shall never find her, mother,' he said, sadly; 'The task is for other hands. You trust Lord St. John to carry on the search as energetically as myself, and I shall go to Brussels to make a home for my wife.'"

"He must be mad!"

"He is terribly altered. A handsome, fascinating man of fashion, who shone in any drawing-room—that was my boy a few months ago; now his one desire seems to be hard work and prosaic money-grubbing. I am deeply disappointed in Clarence, Miss St. John."

Margaret sighed. Perhaps she almost envied the lost Alix the treasure of love which seemed to have been poured out upon her. No one had ever loved her; Margaret, after this fashion.

Lady Manners studied her attentively.

"Of course you will be presented next year? You ought to marry in your first season."

"Mrs. Russell says so."

"Ah! I have heard of her. A very worthy woman, no doubt, and one who has done her duty by you; but you belong to another sphere now. Of course, it is very generous of you to keep your old friend with you, but you would have been far wiser to pension her off. People who have known you under other circumstances are apt to become troublesome."

"Some daughters would have betrayed everything on hearing their mother thus spoken of. May was self-possessed, and betrayed nothing at all; only she said, decidedly,—

"I could not think of sending her away."

"Well, you need not take her wherever you go. I should be most happy to chaperone you on a foreign tour this autumn; but, of course, Mrs. Russell must be left behind. She is terribly provincial and dowdy; she would never go down in good society."

"I am provincial too, Lady Manners."

"My dear, you are Lord St. John's daughter and heiress. I fancy that is how people will best like to regard you."

Meg blushed.

"Well, is it arranged? The whole affair shall be no trouble to you. We will do the Rhine and Switzerland, and then idle through the Black Forest. I think we might buy a ten or twelve weeks very advantageously."

Margaret thought a moment. She knew perfectly that her mother would never shine in society, that it was even dangerous for them to appear in public together, since any acute observer might trace a resemblance between them.

She knew Lady Manners came of a noble family, and that her name was an "open sesame" to the doors of the upper ten thousand. Miss St. John deliberated a moment, and then accepted the proposal.

"You will let me know the probable expenses of the tour," she said, simply, "and I will send you a cheque before we start. I hate talking about money matters."

Lady Manners acquiesced at once.

"I foresee we shall get on admirably. Oh! Miss St. John, what a pity my poor Clarence did not meet you before he sacrificed himself to that foolish child."

"I don't think I am your son's style," said Margaret, gravely; "and I am not sure I shall marry at all."

"Nonsense!"

Mrs. Russell's indignation when the scheme was unfolded to her knew no bounds.

"Am I your mother or not?" she demanded, imperiously. "What have I done that I should be left to stew here in the hottest month of the year, while that old scarecrow's galloping all over the continent at your expense?"

"Lady Manners is not precisely a scarecrow."

"You know what I mean."

"I do not. I think you are most unreasonable. You place me in a position of terrible difficulty, and then grumble because I do my best to carry myself well through it."

Mrs. Russell groaned.

"Riches may be well enough, Meg, but I think, on the whole, we were happier at Mackstone. The bills were a nuisance, and the Queen's taxes almost maddening, but, on this whole, I was happier."

"I was not."

"At least we'd no concealments; there was no fear of exposure and detection."

"And whose fault is it that there is anything to be hidden now? Mother, I can't understand you. You contrived the scheme cleverly; you carried it out admirably, but now you seem as if you must keep thinking of it. Why do you dwell on it? Just let those Mackstone days take care of themselves, and think of me as what the world calls me—Margaret St. John."

The mother's sad reproaches had really touched her. She bent and kissed the widow with some show of affection.

"If I thought you really cared."

"Of course I care."

"You're not like your father. Mary's the same, when you were little, he said you'd more head than heart. I used to think it was a good thing, but many a time lately, I've wished you'd more heart. It seems to me, Meg, sometimes you're really none at all."

"Nonsense!" sharply; "and remember you're not to call me Meg; it is so common."

"Very well. And you really mean to go with Lady Manners?"

"Certainly."

"And I am to stay here?"

"I would rather. You can look after things so much better than a stranger."

Mrs. Russell shook her head.

"I don't think I can stand it, Margaret. I believe three months alone in this house would drive me mad."

"What on earth for?"

Mrs. Russell shuddered.

"It is so big and dreary."

"It is considered one of the most cheerful houses in London."

"But it's full of ghosts."

Meg stared at her in bewilderment. Was anything turning her mother's brain? What did this calm, self-possessed woman mean by talking of ghosts in such an awe-struck tone? Meg had ghosts of her own stored away in her memory, as we all know, but these did not

make her any more sympathetic with her mother.

"What will you say next? Surely you know there are no such things as ghosts? Papa must at least have taught you that much."

"I don't mean spirits," interrupted Mrs. Russell, "or shapes, but voices."

Meg felt even more perplexed.

"What do you mean?" she said, irritably.

"This house is full of relics of the St. Johns."

"Of course it is. I can't have all my father's furniture turned out and fresh put in. People would say I was mad."

Her mother shivered.

"You see, Meg, we know all about them. There's the room where Lord St. John died; there's the little boudoir where his daughter sat; there are pictures of them all over the house."

"Yes," assented Miss St. John. "What of that?"

"Well, I never enter that room; I couldn't. I think it would strike me dead; but even as I go past the door I hear his voice."

"Whose?"

"Lord St. John's. I hear him call to Heaven for vengeance; I hear him plead for Heaven's mercy on his children; I hear him moan that both are wanderers in the wide world. I never go by his wife's picture but the eyes seem to ask me, 'What have you done with my child?'"

She spoke so earnestly, there was such a misery in her voice that Margaret was touched in spite of herself. She put one hand on Mrs. Russell's shoulder, and said, gently,—

"Mother, I am quite sure you are ill."

"Perhaps I am, Meg. You see it's been a great change, this sort of life, from Mackstone, and those voices give me no rest. I've often envied the street labourers lately. I've thought they'd be so tired they must sleep as soon as their heads touch the pillow."

"And you can't sleep?"

The widow shook her head.

"I haven't had a night's rest since I came here. I'm awake all night, and if I fall asleep at dawn I wake in a great fright, with the drops of perspiration running down my face, and those awful voices ringing in my ears."

Seriously alarmed, Margaret began to reconsider her plans.

"I would give up Lady Manners if you required it," she said, gravely; "but it would be injuring my prospects dreadfully."

Mrs. Russell sighed.

"You had better go, child, since you have so arranged it; it is the law of nature that the old should be left. Only I can't stay here. You'd find me in the asylum when you came home."

"Would you like to come with us?"

"And see another woman your adviser, while I was treated a sort of superannuated nurse? No, Meg, a thousand times no. It would break my heart."

"I wish you'd say what you do want," cried Meg, roughly. "I think you are dreadfully unreasonable; you object to everything I propose, and yet can suggest nothing yourself."

"I can suggest something."

"What?"

"You won't like it, Meg."

"You had better tell me plainly what it is."

"I think when you go abroad I will return to Acacia Villa."

Margaret threw up her hands.

"What on earth for?"

"The time it was let for is nearly up, and I believe I should like to go home."

"But—"

"I know"—said the mother, slowly—"I know just what you are thinking, Meg. It can never be home to you again."

"Never."

"But you might come from time to time just to see me."

"I will never cross the threshold of that hateful place again."

"And yet how hard I tried to make you happy there—how I pinched, and toiled, and strived for you, Meg!"

"Don't talk of the past. You wish to go back to Acacia Villa? I don't know that it's a bad plan."

"I do wish it. I should forget all this London life. It would be just as though you had married some one very rich, and left me like we often used to imagine."

There was a lump in her throat. She had not been a good woman; but cold and hard to the world outside, she had yet been a loving, tender mother. If she had erred it was for her daughter's sake, and Meg's awful ingratitude was surely no light punishment!

"I think you had better go," said Margaret, ungraciously. "You have grown so strange and fanciful lately, I am always afraid of people remarking it, and suspecting something. We will consider it settled, mother. The day after I leave England you shall return to Acacia Villa."

To do her justice she offered a very handsome addition to Mrs. Russell's income, but the widow refused firmly.

"I only wanted to be rich for your sake, Meg. I have plenty for myself; and, oh! child, be careful. Do think of the terrible risk you run!"

"You are enough to make me nervous," cried Miss St. John, angrily. "I declare I shall be thankful when the time comes for me to go abroad, if it is only to lose your lamentations."

Mrs. Russell turned away with a sigh. She worked as hard as any paid servant towards preparing Miss St. John's travelling outfit. She lingered over each detail with a mother's love, for some instinct told her it was the last thing she should ever do for Meg. The child of her love, for whom she had sinned so grievously, was drifting away from her. Miss St. John talked of inviting her mother directly she returned from abroad, but that mother had a presentiment the invitation would never really come. Well, she had sold her soul for Margaret, and Margaret was not even grateful.

The evening of her child's departure she was roused from her sad forebodings by the entrance of a servant bearing a card.

"Lord St. John."

She had never seen him since the night he told Meg her treatment of Alix would surely recoil on her own head. This was some weeks since, and she had heard nothing of this young nobleman. The sight of his card turned her pale as marble, and she poured some cordial carefully from a small phial, and swallowed it eagerly before she ventured into Stuart's presence.

He started at her appearance; it was barely two months since she had called on him in that very house to bring him tidings of Lord St. John's heiress. He had thought her then a handsome, well-presented woman, looking wonderfully young to have been Margaret's foster-mother; he saw before him now a pale, frail-looking creature, whose thin cheeks wore the marks of many tears, and whose large dark eyes seemed almost too brilliant for the sad, melancholy face. Despite the summer twilight she was wrapped in a thick, fleecy shawl, and she shivered ominously as she came in languidly.

"I am sorry to have troubled you," said Stuart, with his ready courtesy placing her a chair. "I had no idea you were ill."

"I am perfectly well, Lord St. John, except the heat. London is trying in the summer."

The hand she had given him burnt with fever. Stuart had been strongly prejudiced against this woman from the first, but he pitied her truly as he saw her frail, sorrowful appearance, and he felt indignant with the heiress for leaving her alone.

"I wished to see Miss St. John on a little matter of business, but I daresay you will kindly explain it to her?"

It was very slight; the telling of it barely occupied five minutes. Mrs. Russell wished her visitor would go, but he showed no signs of it.

"The servant told me his mistress was abroad!" he said, suddenly. "Surely you have not allowed her to go alone?"

"Oh, no; she is travelling with Lady Manners."

"Lady Manners?"

"Her ladyship is one of Meg's great friends—Margaret's I mean," checking herself. "She is always telling me not to call her Meg, only I forget."

"Old customs cling to us," said Stuart, good-naturedly. "It seems strange, under all the circumstances, Lady Manners should be intimate with Miss St. John. Don't you think so?"

Mrs. Russell evaded the question.

"I think they are to be gone nearly three months," she said, quietly.

"And you intend to join them?"

"No, I am going home to-morrow."

"Home!"

"To Acacia Villa, I mean. I lived there you know until I came to London with Meg."

"But surely Miss St. John wishes you to share her home? She could not do otherwise."

"I think she would be willing to give me house room," said the widow, gravely; "but she has other claims on her time now. I am getting an old woman, Lord St. John. I couldn't bear to feel I was just a burden on Meg, and that she kept me from charity."

Lord St. John looked troubled. It seemed he was never to hear any good of his newly-discovered kinswoman; now ingratitude was among her foibles.

"I am sure you ought to have good advice before you leave London," he said, gravely. "You are looking extremely ill."

To his amazement her eyes filled with tears.

"I think—I wish I were——"

"Hush!" cried the young nobleman, strangely shocked. "You must not think of such things."

She smiled sadly.

"I don't think I have much to live for, Lord St. John. I have lost my husband and child."

Aye, lost! She spoke no untruth, poor creature. Meg was more truly lost to her mother than if she had been laid to rest in some quiet graveyard beneath the grass and daisies.

A great pity filled St. John's heart.

"We have not thought alike on one or two matters, Mrs. Russell," he said, kindly; "but I can never forget the affection you have shown my kinsman's daughter. I believe you have no near relation of your own. If ever I can do anything to help you; if you are in any pain, trouble, or anxiety that I can remedy, do not hesitate to send for me. I assure you I would come to you with the utmost pleasure."

There was no mistaking the genuineness of his offer; he evidently meant just what he said.

A faint flush dyed the widow's cheek.

"I will remember. Oh! Lord St. John, will you do one thing for me now?"

He wondered what it could be.

"You have my promise," he said, simply.

"Tell me how I can serve you?"

"Promise me, whatever happens, never to be hard on Margaret?"

Puzzled beyond measure at her request, he hesitated for a moment.

"You promised me," she urged; "and that is the only thing I have to ask you. Meg is thoughtless, and perhaps a little selfish, but it is I who have made her so. For myself I ask nothing—nothing in the world, only if a day comes when Margaret is in trouble, I beseech you to befriend her?"

"I don't think Miss St. John is ever likely to need friends, and I am sure she does not like me, but I cannot refuse you. I promise,

solemnly, if ever your adopted child needs such aid as I can give, it shall be hers willingly."

He turned to leave the room, then once again he took the widow's fevered hand in his.

"Heaven bless you!" she said, faintly. "I used to wish you would marry Margaret; I think I am thankful now you didn't. Oh! Lord St. John, when you come to marry choose a wife who loves you for yourself alone!"

CHAPTER XVI.

No feelings had ever been more mixed than those with which Sir Bertram Danvers discovered that May had escaped him.

He loved the lonely girl with an intense, passionate devotion. He would have given up the whole world just for her sake; but his passion was a selfish one.

He knew his love must bring her misery, and yet he persuaded her to leave Mackstone, and cast in her lot with him.

He argued hotly to himself that no one in the world cared for May as he did; that she was so gentle and unworldly that she would never covet honours or popularity.

His love, he believed, would make her happy. Possessed of ample means, he meant to carry his darling abroad; to give up home, friends, and country for her sake, and, devoting his whole life to her, succeed in keeping from her the fact that she had no legal title to his name, and could never be recognised as his wife.

He came back and found her flown. His utmost inquiries never discovered who had come to the hotel and broken the truth to her.

His suspicions never fell on Stuart St. John; he thought more likely one of his own relations or his wife's had witnessed his arrival the night before, and, guessing the wrong he contemplated, had come to warn his victim.

Only one fact remained—she had escaped him. He was angry, disappointed, miserable, and relieved all at once.

Disappointed because he loved the child as his own soul; angry that any one should dare to come between them; miserable at the thought of her loneliness and dangers; and yet through it all relieved that the awful wrong he had dreamed of was spared her.

He would never have had the courage to give her up, now she was free. No shadow of evil would dim the clear purity of her dark eyes, no hidden secret bow her fair head with conscious shame.

He sought her—sought her wildly, as men do seek what they hold most precious. He tracked her to the railway-station, and heard she had taken a ticket for Easton. He never doubted then that she had gone back to her aunt.

"They will break her heart," he muttered. "They will sting her to death by unkind words, and I—I would have treated her as something too sweet and true to be anything but worshipped! I would have made her life a dream of pleasure. They will crush it out of her inch by inch; and yet I suppose people would say she has had a lucky escape!"

He went abroad. England was unbearable to him. He travelled in many lands, leaving no address.

He crossed the African plains; he wandered over southern mountains, hearing no news of any one, seeing no familiar face, touching no friendly hand.

Sir Bertram was a true rover. Often and often he disappeared like this from civilised society, leaving no clue to his whereabouts; but his wanderings this time were more extended than they had ever been before.

Full seven months had elapsed since his hurried journey from Mackstone before, one cold December day, he landed at Southampton, and went on to London as fast as train could take him.

He called at his banker's, and found the

accumulated letters that awaited him. He noticed that the head partner regarded him with a strange, scrutinising air; he could not understand it.

"Am I so very much altered?"

"I should have known you anywhere."

"You stared at me as if I was a wild animal. Are any of my people in town?"

"Haven't you heard?"

Sir Bertram interrupted him.

"I have heard nothing since I went abroad. I have not met a creature who knew me, or received a single letter."

"I am afraid bad news awaits you."

"Tell it me plainly," said the Baronet, briefly. "You have known me a good many years, Rawlins. You know I can stand anything better than suspense."

They were in the banker's private room. Mr. Rawlins thought he had better obey his friend and speak plainly.

"It is about your wife."

Bertram's lip curled.

"Lady Violet is faultlessly perfect," he said, bitterly.

"I believe I never denied it. She is like a marble statue in her perfection; and if I am of the world worldly, I wanted a living, breathing woman for my wife. I never——"

"Hush!" interrupted the other, quickly. "Sir Bertram, your wife is dead."

"Dead!"

It was even so. Strange as it may seem in this nineteenth century Lady Violet Danvers had actually lain in her quiet gravesix months, and her husband had no consciousness of it!

It came on the Baronet with an awful shock. They had been married many years. In his case it was a boyish admiration for a beautiful face; in hers the desire of a poverty-stricken, high-born beauty to ally herself with wealth. She had loved a man too poor for her to marry him. She gave Bertram the cold grey ashes of her heart. In six months he had discovered the truth, and left her.

"Dead!" repeated Sir Bertram again.

"But she was quite young. She never ailed anything."

"Thirty-five. She died quite suddenly. I believe the doctors called it heart disease."

Sir Bertram walked away with a strange sense of relief. His wife had so utterly dulled every feeling of his heart that the news of her death could not move his sorrow. He was conscious of but one feeling—intense content that he was free.

"I will find her if she is alive," he murmured to himself. "I will find my May blossom and tell her earth holds no other wish for me than to call her my wife."

He never doubted he should find May. He never doubted her forgiveness. She was so sweet and gentle, he could not imagine her refusing to pardon a sin that, after all, sprang from love of her.

He stayed in London two or three weeks. There was much to arrange. His long absence had left his affairs in great confusion. Sir Bertram lingered till all was in perfect order, then one bright January morning he took the train for Mackstone.

How it all came back to him as he walked down the old familiar road to Acacia Villa! He could hardly realise eight months had passed since he took his darling away on that fair spring afternoon.

"She will forgive me," the strong man thought to himself, as he mounted the steps of Acacia Villa. "My May blossom deserved nothing but love, and I have a wealth of love to pour out on her. Oh, yes, May will forgive me."

"Is Miss May at home?"

The servant stared at him.

"Mrs. Russell lives here, sir."

"I know. I wish to see her niece."

The girl shook her head.

"Mistress has no niece, sir, that ever I heard of. She lives here all alone."

A strange misgiving seized Bertram.

(To be continued.)

WHAT IS LOVE?

SLOWLY was the twilight gathering
O'er the hills so dear and fair,
And the sunset's parting glory
Shone upon his face and hair,
And I knelt beside him whispering,
"Say, my love, if thou canst tell—
What is love?" He, whispering, answered,
"Darling one, I love thee well."

"What is love? Thou'lt surely tell me?
Hour by hour, and day by day,
Does my love for thee grow stronger,
Dearer now the untrod way;
I will give this love for ever,
Heart in heart we'll ever dwell.
What is love?" And still he answered,
"Darling wife, I love thee well."

Fair his face; but fairer, dearer,
Is his soul so true and pure;
And I thank the Father ever
For his love so strong and sure.
But I wonder what the meaning;
"Though you love, you'll never tell
What love is." And still he answered,
"Little girl, I love thee well."

Darker grew the night, and darker,
Hiding his dear face from me.
Wilt thou love me in the darkness
That may cover thee and me?
Is thy love a strong protection
'Gainst all ills that may befall?"
And the answer came, "My darling
Little wife, I've given all."

"All thou art, and all thou wilt be?
Love is mine for ever then.
Tell me what it is then, dearest—
What is love, my king of men?"
"It is wider than the ocean;
It is deeper than the sea;
It is higher than the heavens;
It surroundeth thee and me."

"Yes, but love— What is love, darling—
Love so great, so high, so deep—
That we cannot bound or limit
This dear love of which we speak?"
"Tis a dear great gift, my darling;
Love is love, my precious wife—
Nothing else can e'er define it—
Love is love, as life is life."

"Yes, I know; and yet, my darling,
I can hardly understand.
Love is love, and life is living;
Love and life are mysteries grand.
What are life and love, my darling?
Tell me, dear, if thou canst tell—
What is love?" And still he answered,
"Darling wife, I love thee well."

M. B. H.

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW EXPERIENCE.

HARRY KINGSWOOD was right in supposing that he had seen Elfie at the railway station. The overstrung girl had so timed her departure from the Hermitage that she should meet its returning owner.

In going away from this place for ever, she wished to carry with her the memory of the man who had been her greatest and her truest friend.

She knew that she should recognise him from his photograph; but there is often something about the living original that no photograph can portray, and she wanted to feel that she had seen the man to whom she owed so much before she went out single-handed to battle with the world.

Of the folly of the step she was taking she was all too ignorant, the spirit of self-sacrifice was strong within her, and in her desire to atone to Lionel Denison for his suffering in the past, she felt that it mattered little what consequences she entailed upon herself.

The train had been in some minutes, and she was hastening towards the station when she saw two gentlemen at the doorway giving orders to a porter and a cabman about some luggage.

A glance at the group told her that one of them was the man upon whose face she had desired to gaze, and so intent was she in carrying away a vivid recollection of him, that she did not in any way observe his friend until she found him staring at her in such an offensive manner that she turned indignantly and looked another way.

As she did so she heard Lionel Denison's voice, and she thought it would linger in her memory so long as life should last.

It was all the work of a few seconds; but as she looked on the face of the man who had stood in the place of a father to her she felt her heart throb, and a wave of emotion swept over her whole being such as never in her life had she hitherto experienced.

Scarcely knowing what she did after this she tore herself from the spot, took her ticket for London, and entering a first-class carriage she got into a corner, dropped her thick veil over her face, and gave herself up to the aimless, purposeless dreams that seemed to have made a home in her heart.

Arrived at Victoria, she entered a cab and told the man to drive to a house in Palace Gardens, where she alighted.

Though it was evening by this time she was evidently expected, and the respectful manservant led her upstairs to the boudoir of his young mistress.

"Elfie, dearest, I am so glad you have come; it is so late that I was beginning to fear you would disappoint me," cried Isolt Greatrex eagerly, as she clasped the lone girl in her arms.

Then she looked at poor Elfie's fair face, and exclaimed, with ready sympathy—

"How pale you are, dear, and you are famished, I have no doubt! We will have tea brought here, and we will have a piece of chicken, or something nice; but you know I am so sorry papa has a dinner party this evening, and I shall be obliged to sit at the head of the table, but I won't stay away from you long, I promise you."

"Oh, don't mind me," responded Elfie, sadly. "I shall be very comfortable if you will give me a book, though I suppose I really ought to try on the clothes you have so kindly provided for me."

"They will fit you, I am sure, and if they won't my maid can alter them," was the ready reply, "and I am not going to let you worry yourself to-night. You will have worry enough when you go to live with Mrs. Maltby, I can tell you."

Elfie smiled sadly.

Her friend had obtained for her a situation as secretary and companion to a lady of advanced views and imperfect education, whose burning desire it was to train the rising generation according to a plan of her own.

This Mrs. Maltby had had a whole host of secretaries of both sexes, and likewise a legion of companions; but they had possessed opinions of their own, they had been too ugly or too handsome, they had been cringing or they had gone to the opposite extreme of being arrogant; something had always happened to curtail the length of their residence in this eccentric lady's handsome abode.

Now, the rich woman had determined to take a secretary who was very young—a girl who had just left school, and who had not yet been contaminated by contact with the world.

An orphan girl, she thought, would be very desirable.

One who had no near relatives, and but very few friends, was what Mrs. Maltby wished to find, so that there could be no repetition of a scene which had happened previously, when her beloved son had suffered a horsewhipping at the hands of an indignant father, and had been glad to say nothing about it.

Isolt Greatrex had heard that Mrs.

Maltby required a young girl as her secretary, and having by the same morning post received a letter from her old schoolmate, Elfie, saying vaguely that she wanted to find something to do, as she meant to leave the Hermitage before the return of her guardian, the kind-hearted creature at once set to work to secure the appointment.

She managed to preserve Elfie's secret at the same time, for the poor little waif had resolved to avoid anything that could lead to her identification to change her name and try to obliterate the past.

Isolt knew her; she could say that she had been to school with her, and Elfie was sure that if her friend did not quite sympathise with her feelings she would at any rate be true to her and maintain her secret.

Mr. Greatrex was a merchant and a politician, and Isolt, who was four years older than Elfie, was his only child. It was therefore easy enough for her to invite her friend to come to the house and stay the night, and she did so, though she took good care to keep her in her own rooms, and refrained from introducing her to any of her friends.

If Elfie had not been so lovely Isolt would probably not have been so cautious. But Mr. Greatrex was a great admirer of beauty. He was likewise a widower, and his daughter lived in hourly dread of the advent of a stepmother.

So, though she meant to be kind to Elfie, she had no intention of introducing her to her father in any way to attract his attention, for he was a very absent-minded man, and it was quite possible that if he met Elfie on the stairs or in the hall he would scarcely look at her, while if she were brought forward and her charms pointed out to him there was just the possibility that he might become enamoured.

Elfie knew too little of the ways of the world, and she was too eager to hide herself from anyone who might at any time meet her guardian, to be conscious that her reception by her friend was not what it would have been had she still been regarded by her as an heiress, and as Mr. Denison's ward.

Instead, therefore, of resenting the want of outward consideration, she was grateful for the almost secret way in which she was entertained, and she was not a little thankful the next morning to be able to go to her situation without having come face to face with Mr. Greatrex.

"I shall drive you down to Maltby Grange, and I shall let Mrs. Maltby see that you are not to be imposed upon for want of friends," remarked Isolt, when Elfie had finished her solitary breakfast. "I am afraid she will try to get all the work she can out of you, my dear."

"I don't mind how much work I do if she is only kind to me," replied Elfie, plaintively.

"Do you know what kind of a woman she is? Has she any daughters?"

"No, she has no daughters, but she has one son," replied Isolt, gravely.

As she spoke she looked at Elfie, and a word of warning with regard to this young man rose to her lips.

But there was something so pure and innocent in her companion's face that the words died upon her tongue, and she felt she would be doing her the greatest kindness by leaving her in blissful ignorance of the character of the man who resided under the roof that was to be her home.

"Who knows he may not like her at all," she mused, "or he may like her so much that he will treat her with proper respect and whatever warning a girl may or may not receive she must herself make a man know how to esteem her."

In which conclusion she was undoubtedly right, and her own conduct in remaining silent was far more prudent than might reasonably have been expected of her.

So Elfie rode towards the Grange, quite unconscious of any danger except that of having an exacting and dissatisfied task mistress.

To call the house in which the Maltbys

lived a grange was to indulge in a polite fiction.

It was a handsome house, standing in extensive gardens, very near the bank of the river, and a wide ditch, which Mrs. Maltby asserted to have been part of a moat, ran along one side of the grounds until it nearly reached the house.

Happily for the health of the inmates of the mansion it branched away before it could do any mischief, and thus saved them from its unwholesome proximity. When Mrs. Maltby made this assertion about the ditch having been part of a moat, her listeners never ventured to contradict her, but, at the same time, they never took the trouble to believe her.

Those who came to Maltby Grange came for their own purposes, and had no idea beyond the desire to compass their own ends; so that if Mrs. Maltby, seated at the head of her own table, had gravely asserted that the moon was made of green cheese they would have smiled and yawned, have taken a sip from their wine glasses, and have said that it was highly probable.

The carriage in which the two girls sat passed through the lodge gates, swept up a handsome drive, and came to a standstill before an imposing doorway, which at the moment stood open.

In answer to an inquiry from Miss Greatrex, a footman informed her that Mrs. Maltby was at home, and, having taken in her card, he conducted the visitors to the presence of his mistress.

The room into which he led them was not a large one, but the heat of it was overpowering. For, though the day was warm, a large fire burned in the grate.

A couple of bookcases filled with books covered a good portion of the walls, while tables stood where there was any space for them—tables that groaned under the pile of books, pamphlets, and MS. with which they were laden. Opposite the fire was a large round table with drawers in the top, and on this were some hundreds of letters and papers, the former having all of them been opened, and some of them having been read. Books, cuttings from newspapers, inkstands, sealing wax and seals, paper-knives and paper weights were all tumbled together on this wonderful table, before which sat the mistress of the place.

She was a short, slender woman, with hair that had once been black, though now it showed marked signs of unskilfully-applied dye. Her countenance was red all over; her features were regular, though somewhat thick; but the most remarkable part of her face was a pair of exceedingly large, prominent black eyes, which the owner thereof had a habit of rolling about in a most uncomfortable manner.

She never, except she were in a rage, could be induced to look another person full in the face; but when talking to anyone she looked at the large diamond ring with which she was constantly playing, or fixed her eyes upon some object that was above the head of her audience.

This peculiarity gave her an air of wisdom and likewise of insincerity; and poor Elsie, as she looked at the singular being who was about to engage her services, felt her heart sink with dread.

She had gone too far, however, to turn back now; be the path of life strewn with roses or with thorns, her tender feet must tread them, and there would be no sympathising heart at hand to afford her pity.

Mrs. Maltby rose as the two girls approached her, and she presented a cheek to Miss Greatrex to kiss.

Then she turned to Elsie, gave her a limp hand to shake, and remarked plaintively,—

"I am so glad you have come, Miss—"

"Heath," suggested Elsie, with a blush.

"Yes, I remember—Miss Heath. As I observed, I am glad you have come. I have that pile of letters to answer, and I want you to

help me. Will you take off your hat here, and sit down at once?"

"Yes," assented Elsie.

But she was feeling suffocated, and she longed to go to the room that was to be her own, and to brace herself up to the task of sitting with this strange woman in this heated atmosphere.

It was useless thinking of what she would like, however; so she took off her hat and gloves, and seated herself at a small table between the two windows, thus putting as great a distance as was possible between herself and the fire.

"Before you two begin your laborious work, I think I will say good-bye," said Miss Greatrex, feeling anxious to get out of the stifling place. "Good-bye, Elsie; I shall come and see you soon. Good-bye, Mrs. Maltby."

"Don't go now; stay to luncheon," replied Mrs. Maltby, absently. "Clarence is somewhere about the house; he will amuse you, while Miss Heath and I get on with our letters."

But Miss Greatrex declined the tempting invitation, for Clarence Maltby was no favourite of hers, and experience had taught her the great undecidability of being a solitary guest at Maltby Grange.

So she went away, feeling that she had done all that the most exacting friendship could expect of her for Elsie, but at the same time secretly thankful that the lines of her own life had been cast in more pleasant places.

For two whole hours Mrs. Maltby dictated, in a slovenly fashion, the letters which Elsie had to write, while the poor girl's head awoke, her hand trembled, and more than once she felt as though she must fall off her chair in a dead faint.

The sound of a gong had twice echoed through the house, when the study door was unceremoniously flung open, and a young man of some four or five and twenty came into the room, exclaiming, in an angry voice,—

"I say, mother, are we going to have any lunch to-day? Augh! what an oven. I wonder you are not both of you baked."

And he walked straight to the windows and flung them wide open, as he remarked,—

"There! Now you can breathe. But I'm hungry—I do wish you would manage to be punctual at meal-time, mother. You'll kill yourself before you need do it, if you go on like this."

"We have only four more letters to write," pleaded the mother.

But the son, in his masterful way, replied,—

"Four or forty, you won't do them before lunch, I can tell you. Ah! who is this? The new secretary, I suppose? Introduce me."

Mrs. Maltby was a tyrant by nature, but habit had made her obedient in small things to her only child, and she mentioned Elsie's name; then she rose from her seat with a sigh and prepared to go to the dining-room.

Elsie had paused from her work, the fresh air coming from the garden laden with the perfume of flowers revived her, and as Clarence Maltby fixed his bold, bad eyes upon her sweet innocent face, he thought he had never seen anything so lovely.

"Come, Miss Heath," he said, with unusual politeness, "you can't live without food, if my mother can; this way, please."

So saying, he walked by her side through the marble paved hall to the dining-room where the meal was waiting them.

Mrs. Maltby went first; she invariably wore a long train upon which it was little short of treason to tread, and as she moved slowly on with her big eyes fixed on vacancy she looked very much as though she were rehearsing the part of Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene.

There was something positively tragic in the manner in which she took her seat at table; and it is scarcely to be wondered, therefore, that Elsie was glad to turn to the young man, who talked cheerfully and who made her laugh at his sallies of wit, that was, however, of a very horsey and ordinary type.

A couple of men-servants waited upon them, and brought dish after dish as though it were an elaborate dinner, but it was not until they had placed fruit and wine upon the table, and left the room, that Clarence Maltby remarked,—

"I say, mother, I've nothing to do this afternoon, so I shall take you and Miss Heath for a drive. At what time will you be ready to go?"

"Miss Heath and I have a quantity of work to do this afternoon, and you must go alone," was the somewhat irritable answer.

"I don't feel disposed to go alone," said the young man, in the tone of one whose will was law.

"Then go, and ask Charlie Birch to ride or drive with you, for, as I tell you, I am busy, and you must leave me alone to-day."

"Charlie is a nuisance; she never forgets that she is an heiress. I hate women who are always thinking of their money. Don't you, Miss Heath?"

"I really don't know," was the answer. "I have not considered the subject, but I suppose that people who have money do think of it sometimes."

"If they'd only do it sometimes I wouldn't mind; it's when they never forget it that I get mad," he replied, irritably.

"But come, mother, at what time will you be ready, for I mean to take you with me?"

"I can't tell you until my letters are written. There are four more that must be answered and posted to-day, then perhaps, I may be able to go with you. And now Miss Heath, if you are ready we will return to my study."

She rose as she said this, and Elsie followed her example, walking at a respectful distance behind the long train.

But she had not proceeded many steps before she felt her hand grasped tightly, and Clarence Maltby bent so close to her ear that his lips brushed her cheek as he whispered,—

"I'll take care you don't stay in that room very long; it's enough to kill you."

The words were nothing; it was the look, the tone, and the manner that made the hot blood rush into Elsie's face as she withdrew her hand and bowed coldly, though with dignity, as she said,—

"Thank you."

Then she followed her task-mistress, little dreaming that the jealous mother had, by the aid of a glass, witnessed the whole scene, and had drawn her conclusions accordingly.

CHAPTER VI.

CHARLIE BIRCH.

Those four letters were a long time in being written, for Mrs. Maltby changed her mind over and over again about their contents, as though she were determined to fritter away the whole afternoon.

Again and again her son came into the study to know when she would be ready; and at last he declared his intention of remaining until she went to dress, a condition of things that soon put an end to letter-writing.

Elsie was not allowed much time in which to attire herself for the drive, for a servant soon came upstairs to tell her that the carriage was at the door and Mrs. Maltby was in it.

So she hastily put the last touches to her toilette and went downstairs.

She found mother and son in the midst of an altercation as to whether they should go, and she observed that when Mrs. Maltby really took an idea into her head and made up her mind to get her own way she invariably carried her point.

"I don't mean to go to the Burlington this afternoon," she heard Clarence say, as she came close to the carriage, "and I won't go!"

"That as you choose," was the answer. "I am going there. Get into the carriage, Miss Heath!"

And, pointing to the seat opposite herself, she indicated where Elsie was to sit.

A dark frown came over the young man's face, and he turned towards the stables, angrily.

It was at times like this that he bitterly realised that the house and the wealth which he enjoyed belonged entirely and absolutely to his mother. She had been a very wealthy heiress before she was married, and her property had been so closely tied up that no one besides herself could touch one penny of it.

This was the case still; her son was completely dependent on her bounty, and though he was very rarely made to feel this humiliating fact, still there were occasions when it was brought very prominently forward.

He had himself to thank for the same this afternoon, for Mrs. Maltby had become suspicious of Elsie, and she was determined to stand on no nonsense on the subject of her son's matrimonial settlement. She was impatient for him to marry; indeed, the longer he put off doing so the better, but when he took into himself a wife she must be a woman of wealth and of good family.

On these two points Mrs. Maltby was inflexible; and something in Elsie, which she could not quite define, made her feel that there might be real danger in this quarter, and this determined her to stamp out the first spark before it could grow into a flame.

"I'm going to call upon Mrs. Burlstone," she remarked, as they rode along; "and we shall probably see Miss Birch, or Charlie Birch, as she is usually called."

She paused, as if waiting for some comment, and Elsie said,—

"Yes."

But she could not help wondering what was to follow.

"I want you to try to cultivate Miss Birch's acquaintance and make yourself specially agreeable to her," continued Mrs. Maltby, "for she would like to come to my house a great deal, and I should like to have her, but my mind is taken up by the great work I have in hand, and until the affection between her and my son has become a formal engagement it is rather awkward for her to be much at the Grange. Now you are with me it is a different matter, and therefore I do hope that you and she will manage to get along together."

"I will do all in my power to induce her to like me," replied Elsie, readily. "Is she very nice?"

"I think her particularly charming," was the answer, "and she has what many very nice girls have not—a handsome fortune."

To this Elsie made no reply.

It is difficult to talk about a person whom you have never seen, and in whom you feel no manner of interest; and Elsie was dimly conscious that Mrs. Maltby distrusted her in some way or other, and this sensation kept her from asking the questions, which would otherwise have risen to her lips.

"I suppose you think that my son is rich enough to be able to dispense with fortune with a wife?" observed Mrs. Maltby, after a time, feeling annoyed at the girl's silence.

"I really haven't thought anything about it," replied Elsie, looking at her companion with widely opened eyes, in which the truth of what she said could be plainly seen.

Mrs. Maltby changed colour and bit her lip, and she liked Elsie none the better, because she was so evidently indifferent to the attractions of her son.

Still she was a woman who delighted to hear herself talk and who liked to talk about herself, and now she entertained her companion by discoursing upon her own riches, and repeating the remark that her son must marry a girl with a fortune, because if he did not his another would not give him a shilling. To all of which Elsie tried to listen with seeming interest, but her half-suppressed yawns must have shown how completely indifferent she was to Clarence Maltby and his possible wife or fortune.

Recently emancipated schoolgirl as Elsie

was, she could not but observe that there was something coarse and repulsive in the son of whom this mother was so proud.

It was not only that he had red hair, bloated features, and a bull-like neck, but his restless eyes were bloodshot, and even when he meant to be ingratiating there was an unconscious insolence in his manner which she felt yet could not resent.

Thus it happened that while Mrs. Maltby was talking about her son and his position and potential prospects in life, Elsie's thoughts had wandered off to another face—so vastly different—a face on which noble feelings and a high purpose had left their indelible imprint, making a countenance originally handsome—sure to be remembered and singled out among thousands.

If she had never seen Lionel Denison she could not have loved Clarence Maltby, though she might have tolerated his liking for herself, but now she felt that the less she saw of him the more comfortable she would always feel.

Indeed, she was tempted to say something of the kind to the mother, who was so very plainly warning her of the imprudence of entrusting the young man, but a certain modesty and delicacy of feeling kept her silent, and Mrs. Maltby read this silence as a sign of discontent, and congratulated herself upon having spoken in time.

It was a relief to her poor heart when the carriage pulled up at the door of an old-fashioned, unpretentious-looking house, the best rooms of which were furthest from the road; and some questions having been asked by the footman, the ladies alighted and went into the house.

The sounds of music were coming from the drawing-room, and so many people were in it when they entered that Elsie looked about wondering who was the hostess, and feeling slightly curious to see the young lady whom Mrs. Maltby desired to have for a daughter-in-law.

A very handsome woman of some six or seven-and-twenty came forward and shook hands with Mrs. Maltby, and would have spoken to Elsie if she had had the opportunity, but the mistress of the Grange was seized with a sudden desire to be confidential, and she led Mrs. Burlstone aside, whispering eagerly the whole time, while her poor young secretary stood nervous and ill at ease, not quite knowing what to do.

"Come and sit here," said a voice, which, though low in tone, had a certain imperious ring in it.

And looking round, she saw that a girl some four or five years older than herself had spoken, and was pointing to a portion of the lounge upon which she herself was seated.

Elsie obeyed with a faint smile, for it was a relief to feel that she was no longer being looked at by most of the eyes in the place.

She was not conscious that it was her rare beauty which had attracted such instant attention.

For she was feeling shy and awkward, and it had suddenly flashed upon her mind that she might be considered an intruder.

The wound which Edith Grey had inflicted upon her pride and self-esteem was far from being healed. She had the morbid dread that everybody with whom she came in contact knew something of her sad story, and regarded her with the withering scorn which the scorned woman had so ruthlessly poured upon her; and this fear gave a nervous, shivering tone to her manner, which was unnatural to her bright, fearless disposition.

Charlotte Birch instinctively felt this as Elsie seated herself by her side, and she said kindly,—

"Mrs. Maltby is about the worst chaperone I know. She thinks of nobody but herself. You are visiting at the Grange, I suppose?"

"No, I am Mrs. Maltby's secretary," was the timid reply.

"Why, how old are you?" was the next question.

"Seventeen," replied Elsie.

"Poor child! You look as though you had only just left school," remarked the other, with sudden interest. "How did Mrs. Maltby get hold of you?"

"My friend, Miss Grestre, heard of the situation, and she knew I wanted to find something to do, so Mrs. Maltby engaged me, and I think I shall get along very well if—"

Then she paused, and, after a momentary hesitation, made no further effort to complete the sentence.

"When did you come to the Grange?" was Charlie Birch's next question.

"This morning," replied Elsie.

"Then you have not seen much of Mr. Maltby, I presume?"

"I have seen him," was the cautious answer, for she felt that she was upon dangerous ground.

"And you admire him, of course?" persisted Charlie.

"No, I do not," said Elsie, emphatically.

"Ah! neither do I; we have something in common at least," said Charlie, with a low laugh. "I don't admire him, and he doesn't admire me. I wonder if you find more favour in his eyes?"

"I don't wish to find favour in them," was Elsie's next remark, made in such a manner that she evidently felt uncomfortable at the very suggestion.

"It will be a pity if you don't," said her companion severely, "that Elsie involuntary looked at her in quick alarm."

"What a simple child you are!" laughed Charlie, "but I like you, and I think we shall be friends. Ah! there comes Mrs. Maltby; she is going to gush over me, and I must screw up my nerves to hear it."

"She wants you to come often to the Grange, and to like me," said Elsie quickly.

"If you think we may be friends, I wish you would come, for my sake."

"All right. If she questions you tell her we have been talking about it."

Then she rose and went a step or two to meet Mrs. Maltby, who was advancing towards her.

Later in the day, when the visitors had gone and the sisters were discussing an invitation to the Grange, which Charlie had accepted, in speaking of Elsie she remarked,—

"She is such a sweet, innocent little thing that I felt quite attracted to her, and I promised Mrs. Maltby to go to the Grange for a week, really for this girl's sake; it's very foolish, I dare say, but we all have our little weaknesses you know, sis."

Mrs. Burlstone frowned, for her sister's remark was aimed at one of her own pet follies, and she said gravely,—

"It is all very well to jest about the matter, but I hope you understand what you are entailing upon yourself by this long visit to the Grange?"

"In what way?"

"Clarence Maltby will propose to you before you come away, and you will be expected to accept him," said Mrs. Burlstone, severely.

"Not a bit of it, my dear," laughed Charlie, brightly.

"If he thought I would refuse him he would propose quickly enough," she went on; "but he won't risk an acceptance, so I feel quite safe."

"And it is possible that you may make up your mind after all to marry him," suggested the half-sister, curiously.

"No, it isn't at all possible," replied Charlie, quietly; "I wouldn't marry him for all the wealth of the Rothschilds, but I shan't be asked to do so, don't be alarmed; you may take a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink."

Mrs. Burlstone shrugged her shoulders, and gave up the discussion.

Charlie was only her half-sister; she was wealthy, and was her own mistress, and though it was natural that the elder and married sister should desire to control her in



["FROM WHOM DOES THIS MESSAGE COME?" ELFIE ASKED, SUSPICIOUSLY.]

some measure, she remembered angrily that she never had been able to do so.

"She will go her own way," she thought bitterly; "and she will get into some nice scraps, I am convinced, and then we shall have to pull her out of it. It's very provoking—very provoking, indeed."

Meanwhile Elfie had been put through a somewhat severe cross-examination as to what she thought of the Burlingtons, and what Miss Birch had said to her; but she answered the questions listlessly and absently, for her mind was full of uneasiness at the hints she had heard about Clarence Maltby, and she resolved that by no word or look of hers should he think he had license to annoy her.

When they reached the Grange they could see the young man at some little distance behind on horseback coming towards them.

"Shall you want me immediately, Mrs. Maltby?" asked Elfie, desirous to escape to her own room.

"No," was the reply, "there is nothing for you to do now till the last post comes in."

"Thank you."

And, so saying, she went upstairs, before the heir could reach his mother's threshold.

Her personal comfort had certainly been considered in this household; for her room, which was fitted up as a study as well as a sleeping apartment, was lofty, spacious, and handsomely furnished, and the three windows commanded an extensive view of park, river, and country.

She unpacked her box, arranged her clothes, and then, opening a well-filled bookcase, began to read.

One of the resolutions which she had formed, and to which she meant resolutely to adhere, was, that she would not mope over the present difficulties that she could not help, nor over the past, which she was powerless to alter.

Time slipped by; daylight faded, and a housemaid came and lighted the gas; then there was another long spell of quiet and

silence, broken at length by the sound of a gong.

The arrangement had been that she should dine with the family and be treated, as Mrs. Maltby euphemistically termed it, "like a daughter of my own," but she felt a great disinclination to dress and go down to dinner to-night, and she determined that she would not do so.

Later on the gong sounded a second time, and soon afterwards a servant came to tell her that dinner was on the table.

"Ask Mrs. Maltby to excuse me, as I have a headache," she said, quietly; "and tell the housekeeper to send me a cup of tea, if you please," she said, slowly.

And the man, after staring at her for a moment, withdrew to do her bidding.

She was the first secretary whom he had seen in this house who had ventured to express a desire of her own, or to give an order.

In due time the tea came, and the headache, which was real enough, slightly abated, and she was thinking she would like to go to bed if Mrs. Maltby did not want her again to-night, when a female servant appeared, bringing a note on a salver.

"From whom does this come?" she asked, suspiciously.

The woman mumbled something and hastily went away, and Elfie uneasily tore open the paper, and found inside it the following words:—

"I want to tell you something of great importance to yourself, dearest; meet me under the trees opposite the study window; the blinds and shutters will be closed—Your devoted
"CLARENCE."

How Elfie's blood boiled as she realised the insult thus offered to her it is needless to say. Her first impulse was to go to Mrs. Maltby and show her the unmanly scrawl, but a moment's reflection told her that she would do no good to herself by such a proceeding,

and, mortifying as the occurrence was, it was best to ignore it.

So she applied the envelope and paper to the gas jet, and let them burn to ashes, throwing the refuse upon the tray which still remained. Then she locked her door, and began to prepare for bed.

Scarcely had she loosened her hair, however, before the handle of the door turned, and some one would have entered without ceremony if the door had not fortunately been locked.

"Who is there?" she asked, in alarm.

"It is I; open the door at once," commanded the voice of the mistress of the Grange, and Elfie hastened to obey.

"Going to bed?" asked Mrs. Maltby, walking into the room with immense authority, and looking all round suspiciously.

"Yes, I thought you would not want me," was the reply, "but I will get ready and come down at once if you do."

"No, I came to tell you that I shall want you down at eight in the morning," was the answer.

But she lingered and wandered about the apartment, looking behind one thing and prying into another, until at last she went away, probably satisfied that her suspicions were unfounded.

If she had taken the trouble to keep a close watch upon her son she would have found him at this same time impatiently waiting under the trees for the girl who did not come.

(To be continued.)

EVERY man must sleep according to his temperament. Eight hours is the average. If a man requires a little more or less, he will find it out for himself. Whoever by work, pleasure, sorrow, or by any other cause, is regularly diminishing his sleep is destroying his life. A man may hold out for a time; but Nature keeps close account, and no man can deceive her.



[LILIAN STAUNCHED THE BLOOD WITH HER HANDKERCHIEF, AND CALLED UPON HUGH TO LOOK UP AND SPEAK TO HER.]

NOVELLETTE.]

LILIAN'S LOVERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE shades of the early winter night were falling over Mother Earth's wide bosom apace as Lilian Lysaght turned her mettlesome Arabs' heads towards home; and flicking them smartly with the whip sent them along at a pace which made Rogers, the elderly groom, who sat by her side, stiffly erect, with folded arms, tremble and quake.

For he knew the capabilities of the handsome animals—capabilities for bolting at the smallest pretext, be it understood; and his wilful young mistress would not allow that there was the smallest atom of vice about Bib or Tucker, or the smallest chance of their taking the bit between their teeth, and setting reins, guidance, and everything else at defiance, going off some fine day at a terrible rate, regardless of the smart phaeton at their heels, and its occupants.

They were such a pair of beauties, with their dappled-grey, satiny skins, their arched necks, slender legs, and full dark eyes! Surely they would never be wicked enough to bolt, and kill or injure her, especially as she went almost every day to the stables, and fed them with sugar and other dainties, and they whinnied at her approach, to show their delight.

No, Rogers was an old famp, whose nerves were destroyed from an over-indulgence in the soothing weed—an old alarmist, who was past enjoying the keen delights of sitting behind a pair of thoroughbreds while they rushed along at a frantic pace, tossing their manes and champing the bits.

They only enjoyed the racing as much as she did, and had no evil intentions—of that she was sure; and, of course, she, Lilian Lysaght, aged eighteen years and eight months, the only child and petted heiress of Rigdon Lysaght, of the How, knew a great deal more about horses than did old Dick

Rogers, who was sixty-five if a day, and who had been in the stable since he was six months old, whose cradle had been a manger, and whose blanket a horse-cloth.

So she chirruped gaily to Bib, and called loudly upon Tucker, to go along, and they did go along, flying over the slippery roads like mad things; while the old groom sat bolt upright, resembling a stone figure more than a living man, and muttered to himself his usual complaint against females, and that "it warn't no matter o' good warnin' 'em, or sayin' anything, 'cos they allus was so heady—they'd only do jist that which pleased 'em, and it didn't matter the vally o' a mole-skin if they knew they'd be killed—they'd do it all the same." Which was pretty correct as far as Miss Lysaght was concerned.

She was impulsive to a degree; always acted without a second's reflection; never could see danger in anything; enjoyed perilous climbs, drives, rides—adventures that most women would have shrunk from, and was decidedly what Rogers termed "heady."

Nevertheless, despite these little faults, she was a very lovable girl, generous, kind-hearted, and affectionate, and the apple of her father's eye—that father whose loving but injudicious indulgence had made her what she was, and partially spoiled what, under judicious training, would have been a very fine nature.

"Well, dad, have you been waiting for your afternoon tea?" she asked, merrily, as with a dexterous turn of the wrist she brought the Arabs to a standstill before the How, on the steps of which stood her father.

"Yes, pussy, I haven't had it yet," replied that individual, kissing her as she reached his side and held up a blooming face to be caressed.

"What a shame! What has Mrs. Field been doing that she couldn't give you your tea?"

"I don't know, my dear; unless it is that he has been sorting her wools."

"Sorting her wools!" repeated Lilian, with energy and contempt. "She might find a better occupation than that, or working those interminable and extremely ugly slippers."

Well, I think she might now," agreed Mr. Lysaght, mildly. "I have ten and a-half pairs, and I think those will last my lifetime."

And then father and daughter looked at each other, and both laughed as they moved towards the small drawing-room where that cheerful, chatty, but utterly useless and needless meal—afternoon tea—was always served; for Mrs. Field, and her harmless and transparent endeavours to entrap the master of the How, was the subject of much mirth and jesting between them.

Yet, truth to tell, the lady in question was rather an old man of the sea—a sort of ancient mariner to Rigdon Lysaght. In a way she hung round his neck—not actually, but metaphorically; in a way she fixed him with her eyes, which were not cold and grey—or the contrary, full and blue, and warm with amorous feeling, and button-holed him by the hour.

She was the widow of a distant poor relation; and some five years before, when Lilian returned from the fashionable boarding-school at which she had been educated, he, thinking she might be lonely without any female companion of her own rank, in a weak moment, listening to the artful insinuations of Mrs. Field, who on her husband's death had taken up her abode in a village contiguous to the How, on the off-chance of getting her foot within the portals of the house, which she coveted with a most unholy longing for her own home, yielded to her suggestion, and engaged her as companion to his daughter, at a stipend of two hundred per annum.

In a weak moment he did this, and he never ceased regretting it. The buxom widow was suave and knowing, courteous and amorous, patient and persevering. She never lost

her temper; she was never ruffled; she was never anything save oily and fulsome, and detestably, inconveniently attentive to the master of the How.

His efforts to shake her off were vain and useless; she would not understand his hints, and was amiably dense when he spoke plainly. He was a gentleman; he could not take her by the shoulders, and turn her from the door, though he longed to do so; and it seemed that that was the only course left—the only chance of escape from slavery.

Fred was a clergyman. He roved about town morning, noon, and night, and the only person who could frighten her away was Lillian, whose sharp tongue and imperious manner she feared.

He was an early riser, being fond of field sports; yet though he rose with the lark, and ordered breakfast at six occasionally, hoping to escape from bondage, he would find his tormentress presiding over the coffee and rolls, smiling and grave, and dressed with all her usual care.

If he went to the billiard-room she would follow, and inquire with an importunate air if she could mark for him, and when he curtly refused would cast herself and give vent to rapturous exclamations at each stroke, till he, sinking down in his seat, would tire himself out to his smoking-room, where, after a while, she would appear, leaning rather than the gentleman's clay pipe, or the latter's shabby tobacco pouch, and affectionately ask if it were his.

Then she was conscientiously religious as to his diet, pressing him to eat oatmeal porridge, loaf bread, mutton broth, or gruel, and other dainties, suitable only for a toothless octogenarian, and most unsuitable for a hale, hearty, flourishing country gentleman of fifty. But, worse than all, she persisted in working wool slippers for him, which took up a large portion of time that might have been better occupied, and presented them to him on all possible occasions—on his birthday, at Christmas, at Easter, and in the autumn.

Mr. Lysaght never attempted to put on a pair of these works of art—yellow grounds with black spots; red grounds with blue lines; gray grounds with green spots, early bunches of flowers; impossible dogs and cats, heads, and other choice designs were favoured by the loving widow; and when finished, mounted, and presented were thrown hither and thither with a heap of discarded shooting and riding boots in his dressing-room, and often made a meal for Brutus, the deerhound, who being young and frivolous had a fancy for boots and shoes, and finding the woolen tops soft preferred them to the others, to the unqualified delight of his master, who gave his valet orders that the hound was to have free access to the boot-room, and that no one was to disturb him while he was occupied in devouring the hated slippers, which by his noble efforts had been reduced from about forty to ten pairs.

There was no light in the drawing-room, as father and daughter entered, save that given by a glowing wood and coal fire, which sent a flickering, uncertain light over the rich gold-threaded Eastern curtains, the warm-coloured plush chairs, the grand piano, littered with valises and songs, over a table spread with a glittering silvered cloth, on which was a Crown Derby tea service, and a lovely vase, containing a spray of the gorgeous poinsettia, whose vivid scarlet and green leaves shone in the firelight, and formed a pleasant contrast to the snowy vase.

"What is the meaning of this? Why are you all in the dark? Why haven't you had tea?" demanded Lillian, somewhat imperiously.

"Oh, really—dear me," stammered Mrs. Field, waking suddenly from a daze and fumbling at her work, "I—I have been so busy that I never thought of tea."

"Indeed! What have you been busy about?"

"These lovely slippers. Just look! Are they not uniquely uncommon—green frogs on a brickdust ground?" and she held them so that the firelight fell full on them, and showed up their hideousness.

"I think they are particularly and exceedingly ugly!" replied Lillian, coolly, as she proceeded to make tea.

"Oh! Miss Lysaght!" exclaimed the worker of the green frogs—Lillian never allowed her to call her by any other name—"they are lovely!"

"A difference of opinion, and I will trouble you now to put your work aside and let us have a little light."

"Oh, no!" cried two or three voices from dark corners of the room. "Do let us have tea by the light of the fire!"

"But you won't be able to see," objected the young hostess.

"Yes they will—pardon the interruption," said a tall man, as he rose from the sofa, on which he had been sitting beside a lady, and drew near Lillian. "They will be able to see quite well enough; and they like the friendly glow," he added, in a lower tone, "and so do I."

"Just as you like," replied Miss Lysaght, with a little gesture of assent, as she turned again to the manipulation of the Crown Derby cups, feeling a strange twinge of annoyance about her; and she could not tell which annoyed her most—the fact of Colonel Reche, who had paid her much attention during the last six months, and had just most devotedly sitting beside Annie Desmond and whispering softly in her ear under cover of the friendly glow; or the fact of Annie Desmond, her old schoolfellow and particular friend, listening with evident complacency to the gallant Colonel's praises.

After a few minutes' reflection she came to the conclusion that she was most angry with Annie, whom she dearly loved, and for whom she had been planning out a future, and, at the same time, a way for her father to escape from his tormentress.

Miss Desmond was a good-looking, steady, sensible young woman of five-and-twenty, fond of riding to hounds, going out with the hounds, early rising, pigs, poultry, and country life in general—just the sort of wife, in fact, for Mr. Lysaght, who, with his bright brown eyes, sunny face, and raven black hair, guileless of a single white thread, looked not one day older than forty, and was a man any woman might be proud to call husband.

They would pair nicely, Lillian thought; and she was sure her father rather more than favoured this pretty, sensible piece of womanhood.

It was too bad that she should sit there in the dimly lit room with Royston Reche listening to his soft nothings and looking very, very pleased, just as young lovers, and that theirs was a no-nothing, but a splendid home.

"The delight of happy laughter,"

"The delight of low replies,"

She was quite angry. Of course she did not care a bit about herself—it was all on account of her father and the tumbling down of her castles in the air. It was nothing to her what the colonel did; he was at perfect liberty to flirt with whom he wished, and she knew he was one—she had heard so over and over again; yet she had not thought of him in the light of that most detestable of all objects—a male flirt, when he had been at her side, hanging over her chair, holding her fan, whispering in her ear, paying her all those trifling little attentions that women like and value from handsome men.

And Royston Reche was handsome, with a wonderful pair of dark-fringed grey eyes that had looked away many a maid's heart, both high and low; and he could be very winning and fascinating when he liked, and he had liked with Lillian, and strove to make himself agreeable to the utmost extent of his power, and last, though not least in the eyes of most women, he was said to be very

wealthy—only said, because he possessed no estates, neither had he money in the funds, nor suuk in foreign bonds, nor houses, nor anything that brings in money—while his pay as a colonel, handsome as it was, was quite inadequate to his wants and extravagant expenditure.

Perhaps Messrs. Samuel Levy, Jeremiah Judah, and a few more of that choice fraternity knew where the money came from which kept up the Colonel's most phæstion and high-stopping home, his trim valet, his choice wines and cigars, and which enabled him to indulge so many early tastes, to give such well-appointed dinners, to have a yacht in the season, and to be in the front rank of men of fashion.

Perhaps they knew, and perhaps they guessed that it was the ruinous trade of insurance which he paid that was drawing those lines about the corners of his handsome eyes, giving at times a haggard look to the whole face, robbing it of half its charm.

How was it to end? The brilliant life—all show, glitter, and meretricious splendour. Well they knew, and perhaps he did, too, in the dark moments when he faced the truth, looked into the face. It must end in blank despair, and a bullet from his own hand, or in a rich marriage.

These were the only two alternatives, and the gallant and extravagant son of Mars chose the pleasant of the two, and cast about for a rich and beautiful woman, and had determined to throw the handkerchief to Lillian Lysaght.

Whether she would pick it up or not remained to be seen. But he did not fear. He had tamed wilder game, and the quarry in this instance would give ample sport, well repay time and trouble expended.

With these thoughts uppermost in his mind he stood beside her as she poured the fragrant tea into the dainty cups, and watched the white hands as they glanced here and there about the equipage.

"Am I not to have any?" he queried, at last, when he had given tea to the six or seven people in the distant corner.

"I beg your pardon," she answered, hastily rectifying her mistake, while a vivid blush swept over her fair face as she met his eyes fixed tenderly on hers. "I thought I gave you some."

"No, you forgot me, utterly and entirely."

"I am very sorry. I will give you an extra lump of sugar to make amends," and she laughingly put in a huge lump.

"That is very good of you, but I shall require something more."

"Really? What is that?"

"I want to hear what you did all this afternoon, during that long drive, while you seemed so, me in particular," he concluded, in a lower tone.

"That is rather amusing," she rejoined, lightly, "considering that you and the others would not come. I suppose you were afraid of the cold?"

"I daresay the ladies were. What kept and from your side was the having to write three impetuous business letters."

"Were they very imperative?" she demanded, jestingly.

"They were, indeed," she answered, convincingly.

He did not add, though that they were to Messrs. Samuel Levy, Jeremiah Judah, and Sam. Moses, three of his most affectionate Jewish friends, who never lost sight of his whereabouts for more than a week at the outside, and whose solicitude about his place of residence, and other little personal matters, was, to say the least of it, most embarrassing.

"How wretched it must be to have such letters to write!"

"It is, indeed, especially when it absorbs us from pleasures we wish with all our hearts to enjoy."

"I think, as the Yankee say, that I should let things slide if I found they annoyed me."

"I don't think you would."
 "And I am sure I should."
 "I am not."
 "Why? how can you tell?"
 "I judge from your actions."
 "What actions?"
 "Several."
 "Name them, please."
 "Well, you wouldn't let visiting your poor people slide."
 "Oh, no!" she cried, energetically, "but that is a very different thing. They might want some of the comforts I take them, and then they are disappointed if I don't go and chat with them once or twice a week."
 "I am not surprised at that," he remarked, pointedly, letting his eyes dwell with somewhat bold admiration on her face.
 "Old Dennis to-day," she went on, hurriedly, "wanted tea and snuff; if I had not gone, think how disappointed the poor soul would have been!"
 "Doubtless; and many of the other old grannies too. What number of gaffers and gammers do you play the part of Lady Bountiful to, Miss Lysaght?"
 "About a hundred."
 "So many as that?"
 "Yes."
 "Quite a little regiment. Do they all belong to your father's estate?"
 "No; only about half the number."
 "And the other half?"
 "Belong to the Gordon estate."
 "Ah! yes, Gordon Hall has indeed a master for some years past now, has it not?"
 "Yes; for ten years before his death Colonel Gordon did not live there. He took a dislike to it after his wife's death."
 "What a pity such a fine place should be neglected!"
 "It is. But it will be neglected no longer."
 "Why?"
 "Because the new owner is coming to take possession."
 "And who is he—some nouveau riche, who has bought the place with money made by soap-boiling, or pig-selling, or some other lucrative and unattractive trade?"
 "By no means; he is Mr. Hugh Gordon, nephew to the late Colonel," and Lillian, as she spoke the name, turned her head a little aside, in case the treacherous fire should break into a sudden blaze, and show the blush on her cheek—the blush that rose at the mere mention of Hugh's name—Hugh, who was her childhood's playmate, her girlhood's lover, and whom she had not seen for over two years.
 "Ah! then the Colonel had no family?"
 "None."
 "And this young fellow steps in. How old is he?"
 "Twenty-six."
 "And the Gordon estates yield a rent-roll of ten thousand?"
 "Yes."
 "He is a very lucky fellow. How is it that he has not entered into his new dignities before? It is over a year since Colonel Gordon died."
 "He had an appointment in India, and did not seem in any hurry to give it up, and return to England."
 "When is he expected?"
 "To-morrow."
 "To-morrow!" repeated the Colonel, in some dismay, for he felt this young millionaire might be a formidable rival. "So soon?"
 "Yes. He is coming here to stay with us for a few weeks," continued Miss Lysaght, calmly, little knowing the stab she was giving, "until his house is made habitable. For ten years only the housekeeper and three or four old family servants have lived there, so, of course, it wants a considerable amount of renovation."
 "Of course," agreed Roche; "and it will be pleasant for him to be here with old friends than in a damp place, which has long been given over to the bats and the rats."
 "I suppose you are old friends?" he added, a moment later, regarding her keenly.

"Oh! yes," she rejoined, with a gay laugh; "papa was a sort of guardian to him. After the Colonel left the Hall, and went abroad, Hugh came here, and lived with us."
 "You must have been very good friends, then?"
 "We were—just like brother and sister," and that answer relieved Royaton Roche's mind considerably, and he prepared to welcome the newcomer on the morrow warmly.

CHAPTER II.

THE next day there was a decided thaw, and Mr. Lysaght, with some of his guests, set out for a meet which was to take place at Thorn-dyke Manor.

"You won't come, Lily?" he asked, as the horses were brought round.

"No," replied his daughter, "I think one of us ought to stay at home, in case Mr. Gordon arrives."

"Quite so, my dear. I don't expect that he will arrive before the afternoon."

"Possibly not; still it would not be pleasant for him to find us all out. You probably will not be back before seven or eight."

"I shall be here, and can receive him if you wish to go," put in Mrs. Field.

"Thank you, I don't," replied Lillian, coldly, "and you might fall asleep, or become so deeply engrossed in your wool-work that you would forget all about our guest."

"Oh, no," expostulated the fair widow, who was looking remarkably well in a blue cloth dress, which squeezed her stout waist to moderate proportions, "I should not do that! I should be so much interested in any friend of dear Mr. Lysaght's."

"Your interest is quite unnecessary in this case. Good-bye, dad," she added, to her father, who was leaving the room with Roche, "I hope you will have a good day's sport."

"I hope you will, too," said Mrs. Field, following him to the door. "But pray, pray, dear Mr. Lysaght, do be careful. This is only a partial thaw; it will be very slippery in places, and dangerous going. Pray, pray be careful of your precious life. Do not ride recklessly, I beseech you."

"Oh, all right," responded dear Mr. Lysaght testily, feeling he was being made a fool of before his guests, while Roche said, jestingly,—

"Don't be frightened, Mrs. Field; I will look after our host, and bring him back safe and sound."

"Do, do," she implored, with clasped hands; and amid a shout of laughter, in which Annie Desmond, who was mounted on a smart little black mare, joined, the fox-hunters set off, Lillian noticing with keen satisfaction that her friend rode first with her father, and that Colonel Roche was between two men.

All that morning she flitted about like a butterfly, superintending the arrangements of the blue-room, which was being prepared for Hugh Gordon's reception. With her own hands she filled the vases with the choicest blooms from the conservatory, and settled the lace draperies of the mirror, and gave a last few finishing touches.

Then when all was done she went downstairs to await the arrival of her old playmate with what patience she could command, and patience was not one of her virtues.

Just before lunch-time she heard the roll of wheels on the gravelled paths, and flying to the window was just in time to see a slender, elegant-looking man descend from a carriage.

"And are you Hugh?" she asked a moment later, as he entered the room, and clasped both her hands in his.

"Yes, I am Hugh," he answered, looking down at her. "Wouldn't you have recognised me?"

"I hardly know," she replied, gazing at him reflectively. "The beard makes such an alteration in you. I should know your eyes, though, anywhere," she added, as she met the glance of his honest, candid blue orbs.

"I shall owe a debt of gratitude to my eyes from this time henceforward," he laughed.

"Three years does make a wonderful difference in a fellow, makes one old and haggard." "You are not that," she declared, quickly. "You look quite young and fresh, and not at all like an Anglo-Indian."

"I am glad to hear it. Some of the nabobs I met out there were yellow as guineas or parched peas, their skin hung in wrinkles, their eyes were sunken, and they hobbled about in an awful fashion, their only interest in life being the state of their liver."

"Poor creatures! I pity them. Those are the results of a long residence in the East."

"Yes, and of unlimited indulgence in brandy, punch, Bass's ale, highly seasoned curries, mounds of huiwah, and other indigestible dishes."

"If that is the case they are not deserving of pity."

"Perhaps not. Yet those who have never been in India cannot imagine the delight of a draught of iced ale after having been out in the scorching heat, under the rays of the blazing sun."

"I suppose not. And are you glad to come back?"

"Need you ask?"

He turned his beautiful eyes on her with a look that brought the blood to her cheek, and made her tremble.

"Life in the East is—no—no—no like a fairy tale," she stammered, helplessly.

"It may be so under some circumstances. I prefer England, because my dearest friends live here."

"Lunch is ready," she said, quickly, as the sound of the gong rang through the house. "You must be furnishing after travelling all night."

"I am rather hungry," he admitted, as they crossed the hall and entered the dining-room, where Mrs. Field was seated in solitary splendor.

"My dear Mr. Gordon, I am so very, very glad to see you again," she commenced, effusively, taking his hand and squeezing it tenderly. "It seems an age since you left us!"

"It does, indeed," he agreed, rather taken aback by the squeeze, and wondering whether he ought to return it or not. "Time, however, has passed you over. You don't look a day older than when I left."

"Ah! really you don't mean that?" she simpered.

"I do!" declared Hugh, taken in by the wonderful get-up of the widow, the artistically rouged cheeks, the darkened eyes, the compressed waist. "You're looking wonderfully well!"

"Thanks, thanks; and Miss Lysaght, she has altered, has she not?"

"Yes. She was just at the budding age when I left, now she has bloomed."

"In fact, I'm full blown," she said, with a wicked smile, and a side glance at the widow's comfortable proportions.

"Not quite yet," he retorted; "but there is no knowing what you may come to if you don't take plenty of exercise. You are somewhat inclined to embonpoint."

"Quite so," she agreed, surveying her slender figure in the mirror opposite, with quiet approval. "I do take plenty of exercise. I inherit the liking for it from my father, I suppose."

"I suppose so. He is extremely active."

"Rather too much so," chimed in Mrs. Field. "Fancy, only fancy a man riding to hounds on a day like this, when the thaw is but partial! It is most foolhardy—absolute madness!"

"I don't think so, and if I had arrived yesterday I should have made one of the party."

"And if," said Lillian, who had of late said

"But he may be killed," sighed the nervous widow. "His horse may fall and roll on him."

"The same accident might happen to any other member of the hunt."

"That wouldn't matter so much," she announced, coolly.

"Not to you," observed Miss Lysaght, "still to others it might. There are others who have objects on which they expend their heart's best affections, and perhaps not so hopelessly as you do."

"You are right," rejoined the widow, with sudden venom, for she secretly hated Lillian. "It would matter very much to you if Colonel Roche's dead body was brought here and laid at your feet."

"Mrs. Field, you forget yourself!" said the young mistress of the house, with great dignity rising from the table, closely followed by Hugh, who felt that he should like to box the fat woman's ears for her impertinence, and also because a thrill of pain at her words, the first of many and many an after twinge, shot through his heart.

"Shall we go out?" asked Lillian, pausing in the hall.

"If it is not too damp and cold for you."

"It is very seldom that for me," she responded.

"You still go out in all weathers?"

"Yes. I think it is that which makes me so strong and hardy."

"Probably."

"Will you wait here? I won't be a moment," and in an astonishingly short space of time she returned, clad in a long sealskin coat, and a toque of the same fur, with an orange-coloured bird at the side, perched jauntily on her jolly tresses.

"How charming she is!" thought the man at her side. "How lovable! What a treasure for some man to possess! Some man! Yes, and who is this man that venomous old toad speaks of—this Colonel Roche? Does she love him, I wonder? She flushed at his name. Are all my hopes to be blighted? Have I come these many hundred miles to hear a 'no' from her sweet lips? Heaven send not. I love her so well, my little playmate, my boyhood's sweetheart! All my wealth will avail me nothing if I lose her—the greatest prize life holds for me!"

These thoughts kept him silent as he paced along through the woods, where the bare branches seemed to speak silently of the young year, of the advancing spring, which would bring bud and bloom.

The cinquefoil was of a faded green, and the wild parsley fresh-looking; some black privet-berries remained, and a few ivy-berries yet clung to the parent stem, overlooked by the hungry birds, who long since had taken the acorns, which in autumn thickly carpeted the earth.

Grey-veined ivy trailed here and there, and a few fronds of fern peeped out amid the greenish lichen; beyond the gorse was sparsely sprinkled with golden blooms; and in sheltered spots the homely dandelion was opening—otherwise there was a singular absence of colour.

Nature seemed faded, almost dead, and as though she had not the energy to arise and make an effort towards regeneration.

"What is that?" asked Lillian, as a quick note rang through the air, and then a short burst of song.

"The first was a chaffinch, the second a thrush."

"How early for them to sing!"

"Yes; but thrushes sing, irrespective of the season, every mild day in January; and if the sun be shining to-morrow morning I have no doubt in this quiet spot that the larks will soar and sing."

"I shall come out and see."

"Do—and I will come with you, if I may!"

"Of course you may," she nodded, smilingly.

"Thanks!" murmured Hugh, feeling happier than he had since the mention of Colonel Roche's name.

"Where did the meet take place to-day?" he asked, after a silence of some minutes.

"At Thorndyke Manor," replied his companion.

"Ah! do they still meet at the same place?"

"Very often."

"I am sorry I was not in time to go out with them. I should have enjoyed a spin with the hounds."

"Yes; so should I."

"And my expected arrival prevented you?"

"I did not wish you to arrive and find no one to welcome you, or only Mrs. Field."

"You think she would be worse than nobody?"

"Far worse."

"So do I. How am I to thank you for staying at home to welcome me?" he asked, tenderly.

"It was nothing, really. A hostess could not do less."

Her words sent a sudden chill through him. It was simply an act of courtesy, then—nothing more! It was not from a wish to see him and greet him alone, free from the espionage of prying eyes, that she had given up her gallop after the red rogue.

"Shall we walk on to Glaston Fallowfield?" she asked, breaking rather an awkward silence.

"If you wish it, and are able for so much," he returned, with ceremonious politeness.

"I am quite able," she said, quickly; "and we may see some of the sport there, if the fox heads that way—or, at least, meet them returning."

"Yes," he agreed, absently, his eyes fixed on the range after range of distant hills, attaining almost mountain heights at last, behind which lay the home of his forefathers, the splendid inheritance which has been left him, and to which he hoped some day to bring as bride the lovely girl at his side.

On they walked in silence, he busy with his thoughts and rosy hopes of the future, which seems to hold such fair, such brilliant possibilities for him, she straining her eyes to catch the first glimpse of the scarlet coats that might come that way.

On they went by the half-thawed river, which curled and wound like a silver serpent through the valley—on past leafless woods and groves, through Lampton Spinny into Rankdene Gorse.

"Do you think it is advisable to go any farther?" he queried, with an anxious look at the rapidly-darkening sky.

"Perhaps not," she replied, reluctantly.

"Oh! there they come," she added a moment later, as a party of ladies and gentlemen, mud-spattered and road-stained, rode out of the wood, and came towards them.

"Why, pussy," cried Mr. Lysaght, reining up as he caught sight of her, "what has brought you here?"

"I walked over with Mr. Gordon," she answered, making a little movement with her hand at the man by her side.

"Bless me, Gordon! Hugh, is it really you? I shouldn't have known you. How you've altered!"

"Haven't I?" originally remarked Hugh, as he grasped his host's hand.

"So glad to see you," and he shook the young fellow's hand again and again in his delight. "Come, I must introduce you to my other guests—Colonel Roche, Mr. Gordon; Miss Desmond you know," and so on and so on, until Hugh had bowed to some, shaken hands with others, and made the acquaintance of all.

"What sport had you?" Lillian asked, as they set out on their return journey, of the gallant Colonel, who reined in his horse to a snail's pace, in order that he might keep at her side, and not leave the field quite clear for the rival he dreaded, who walked beside her as though he had every right to do so, and meant to keep the right.

"Fair average," he replied, leaning down from the pigskin to answer her question.

"First we had a very fast spin from Thorn-dyke over four fields to ground, and killed. Then we went to Hungerton Holt, found in the first quarter, and went straight away, over Quenibrook, which, as you know, requires

jumping, by Gossington Thorp, and then nearly over the same line again. Foxes lie out very much about there; fresh ones kept continually getting up in front of the hounds, who kept running from one to another, for over an hour, when they were stopped, and laid on again in Branksbrane Burrows. Here we found a real good fox, who gave us a run of three hours, by Dachent over the brook to Gabledene, up to which point all went well. Here the grief began. First of all, many fell into the brook, trying to ford it, including your friend, Miss Desmond."

"Was she hurt?" asked Lillian, anxiously. "Not much, only soured," returned Roche, with a little laugh, which showed he had enjoyed the sight. "Then Mrs. Rendell had a bad fall on the road, and Major Bennett was thrown, and broke his jaw."

"Poor old man! I am sorry to hear of his accident."

"Yes. We did all we could for him."

"I might have suffered had I gone out, as it seems to have been an unlucky day."

"You might, but it is not very likely. You are too good a rider."

"Good riders sometimes come to grief as well as bad ones."

"Sometimes, not often, when they ride as you do," and there was so much bold, undisguised admiration in the Colonel's eyes, and so much undisguised tenderness in his tones, that Hugh felt that he should like to take him by the shoulders, and give him a thrashing, for his, what he termed, insufferable impertinence.

"Yet was it impertinence?" he wondered the same evening, as he saw Royston hanging over Lillian after dinner, as she sat at the piano, and noted how soft the expression of her eyes was as she looked up at him; "or had this man been encouraged by the woman he loved during his absence?"

It might be so. He had left her a girl of sixteen; he found her, after three years' absence, budded into a beautiful woman. She might have forgotten him and their childish love in the superior attractions of this dashing hussar, who had all the qualities that please women. "I shall not have much chance against him," he muttered, gloomily.

CHAPTER III.

This notion grew stronger in Hugh Gordon's mind as the days rolled on, and made him retire, like a sensitive snail, within his shell, and appear somewhat cold to his old playmate. The Colonel was ever at Miss Lysaght's side, ready to do her lightest bidding. He sang with her, walked with her, danced with her; and last, though not least, rode with her, and in the last occupation he showed up to perfection.

"When the country is deepest, I give you my word 'Tis a pride and a pleasure to put him along; O'er fallow and pasture he sweeps like a bird, And there's nothing too wide, nor too high, nor too strong."

She admired his brilliant riding, his daring leaps, his firm seat, his untiring energy; still, sometimes, she felt she would like to ramble along at a quieter pace, and listen to Hugh's anecdotes of India, or hear about his plans for the future. But the Colonel hardly gave her a chance of chatting to her old playmate; and Hugh, in disgust, would have left the house at the end of a week had it not been for Mr. Lysaght's protestations. He declared that Lily would be more than disappointed, tho' she might not acknowledge it, if he left them; that she had looked forward eagerly to his arrival, &c., &c.; and the wish being father to the thought, the young man plucked up a little courage, believed that it was so, and gave her a magnificent jade necklace, which he had brought over.

"Is it really for me?" she asked in delight, as he gave it.

"Yes, really. I brought it over on purpose for you."

"How good of you. I shall never be able to thank you enough."

"Don't try, please. It repays me to know you like it."

"I do, indeed. I am so fond of Indian ornaments."

"I am glad of that, for I have some tiger claws and filigree silver things for you. They have been sent on to the Hall, but we can get them to-morrow when we go over there. You are coming, are you not, to see the alterations?"

"Oh, yes. I have been looking forward to seeing the old place again. Fancy, it is ten years since I was there."

"Quite an age!" he said, with a fond glance at her, for her cordiality was raising hope within his breast once more, and fanning it into a strong flame. "You will see a difference, I think."

"I hope not a very marked one. I like everything that is antique, and always feel as if I should like to kill people who renovate and repair and destroy old buildings."

"I hope you won't slaughter me," he laughed.

"Do you deserve death?" she asked, in the same spirit of jest.

"Hardly," he returned. "I have tried to improve, not to destroy, and hope your verdict will be favourable to-morrow."

"I shall be very critical," she declared.

"Do; I want you to be so. To find fault, to suggest alterations, to tell me exactly how you would have things done, the house arranged, and what you don't like."

"But why should I do this more than any one else?" she asked, raising her eyes to his, and dropping them consciously as she met his impassioned glance.

"Because I hope one day that you will be—"

"Miss Lysaght, are you not coming for a ride this splendid afternoon?" broke in Roche's voice, across the pleading tenderness of Hugh's, as the former entered the room, booted and spurred, and ready to mount.

"Not to-day," she answered, feeling half cross and half pleased at the interruption.

"Do. I have ordered them to saddle Memory for you."

"I can't really come. I have an engagement."

"Yes, here is the person to whom she is engaged," said Miss Desmond, appearing in the doorway. "I have come to claim my victim."

"The victim is quite ready," said Lillian, rising at once and joining her friend.

"Then we can depart," and the two girls went up to Lillian's room, and over sundry cups of afternoon tea the news was imparted that Annie Desmond had promised to become, at no very distant time, mistress of the How, and emancipate Mr. Lysaght from slavery, free him from the clutches of the fat, fair, and amorous window.

"I suppose Annie has told you the news?" he said next morning to his daughter, as they stood together alone in his smoking-room.

"Yes. I was so glad to hear that it is all settled," she answered, kissing him.

"So am I," he cried jovially, returning her embrace. "I feel a different man now that I know that dreadful woman, with her dreadful slippers, will have to go."

"I suppose so. You will have to pension her."

"Yes. I shall give her a hundred a year while she keeps a hundred miles away from the How. The moment she comes a foot nearer I shall stop it."

"Bravo. That's right."

"And now, have you nothing to tell me?" he asked.

"No," she replied, with evident confusion. "What should I have?"

"Well, pussy, Hugh has been speaking to me about you and his future. The old boyish love has not died out, it burns as steadily as ever; you have only to say 'yes,' and you will be mistress of the finest country seat for miles

round, and wife to a noble fellow. He thinks you have still some affection for him."

"Does he?" broke in Lillian, while a red spot burnt furiously in either cheek. "What justifies his thinking that?"

"Well—well, my dear, I hardly know," stammered her father, startled at this burst of indignation. "Your behaviour to him, I suppose."

"He may find my behaviour different for the future," she said, significantly.

"What fad have you got in your head now?" he asked, with some irritation. "I hope you won't be foolish, and throw away the chance of the best match in the county?"

"I shall act as I please about that."

"I imagine so. You generally do act as you please. Is it possible you prefer Colonel Roche? Of course, he is very fascinating and handsome, but he has not the same sterling qualities that Gordon possesses, and though well off"—Mr. Lysaght knew nothing about Jeremiah Judah and Co.—

"cannot have such an income as Hugh's."

"Am I to sell myself, then, to the highest bidder?" she asked, with scorn.

"By no means," he rejoined, with cold displeasure. "Yet you seem to forget that I am going to marry again a woman of your choosing, and that if I have a second family your inheritance will be considerably smaller than it is now."

"I don't forget that, dad," she said, as she kissed him penitently.

"And you will be sensible and—"

"Not if being sensible means accepting Mr. Gordon," she interrupted, with flashing eyes. "No man has a right to assume that a woman loves him before she has said so—to think that he has but to ask and receive at once what he wants—to believe, in fact, that a woman is ready to fling herself into his arms."

"I am sure Hugh does not think that."

"It seems to me that he does."

"You take a wrong view of the case."

"Perhaps so. My views, however, are not likely to alter."

"In that case it is useless to discuss the matter any more."

"Quite so; and we haven't time. The coach has just driven up the door. We shall have to start in a few minutes."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Lysaght, lugubriously, as he followed her into the hall, where most of his guests were assembled, feeling that he had done Hugh's cause more harm than good.

All was bustle and confusion for a few moments, till each one was in their proper seat; and then the coach, horsed by four bright bays, went off in great style to the tan-tara of the groom's horn.

It was a beautiful February morning—soft, mild, balmy; and the greater portion of those seated on the coach enjoyed the fifteen-mile drive through pretty scenery.

Not so, however, Lillian. Her impetuous, undisciplined spirit was wounded by what her father had said—her dignity offended, her pride humiliated; for it seemed to her that it was humiliating that any man, even her old playmate, should think she loved him.

She determined to revenge herself to show how mistaken he was, but all the same her heart ached, and she felt dull and listless.

"How lovely!" cried Annie Desmond, as, turning a sharp corner, they saw the pretty village belonging to Hugh winding its white way up the hillside, here and there nestling into bowers of the freshest greenery, fresh with all the budding sweetness of spring.

The great hills, towering range beyond range, formed a half-circle about the little village, sheltering it from bitter winds, stretching out their rocky arms far into the sea, making a safe haven for the fisherfolks' boats, which lay drawn up on the wet, shiny beach, a fine stretch of sand for them to dry their nets on.

There was an air of perfect repose about this miniature town—a peaceful look of rest—which was very pleasing to London eyes; and even the gallant colonel gave vent to some

words of admiration, which grew louder and longer as they came in sight of Gordon Hall, which was charmingly situated at the foot of one of the great hills that encircled the valley and village, and at a bend of the river, which wound in and out among the hills, gurgling its way merrily over mossy stone and shining shingle through the village to the sea.

The house was of the Stuart era, and bore signs of the battering it had received from time to time when its possessors had defied Cromwell's Ironsides, and, later on, when gallant Jacobites had hidden behind its strong walls. It was irregularly picturesque, with its mullioned oriels, battlemented walls, and donjon keep; and though grey, hoary, and time-worn outside, was thoroughly comfortable inside.

What could be pleasanter than the dining-room, where the young possessor brought his guests first, and where luncheon was laid out, with its carved oaken doors and fireplaces, its beamed ceiling and panelled walls, its polished floors and brightly-tinted oriel windows; or the corridors, stretching the whole length of the house, and the square gallery looking down into the entrance hall, or the stately drawing rooms, with the antique tapestried chairs, and old-fashioned lounges, and furniture, which Hugh had taken pains to have renovated in an ancient style, so that no one looking at the Watteau tapestries, so costly, so antique-looking, would have guessed that not six months before they had been manufactured in France!

The same care, the same good taste, was visible everywhere. It had been a labour of love preparing the nest for the bird—the bird that perhaps would never fly to it, and Hugh was pleased to hear the encomiums of his guests. If the arrangements pleased them, he might surely hope that they would please her, the woman he loved, the woman he had laboured in all his endeavours so sedulously to please.

"This is more to my liking," observed the Colonel, as the exploring party, after having examined the family portraits, many dim and faded, and the men in armour in the entrance hall, and the battle-field trophies of Gordon's martial ancestors, found themselves in a large boudoir, furnished entirely in the modern style.

The change was striking. They stepped from a mediæval hall full of weapons, dating from the Wars of the Roses, and grim figures clothed in steel, into a splendid apartment, hung with modern tapestry, and furnished with extreme luxuriance. Exquisite marble statues, rare china, valuable pictures, inlaid chairs, satin couches, rare antiquities, gossamer laces, worth their weight in gold, jewelled miniatures, exquisite carvings crowded this apartment, and made it fairylike and lovely.

"Yes, this is more to my liking," he repeated. "Everything bright and new; those dull old rooms are depressing. Don't you think so, Miss Lysaght?"

"No," she replied, promptly. "I like antiquities, and much prefer ancient rooms to modern ones."

Eagerly Hugh listened for her answer, and a look, half disappointment, half pleasure, swept across his face as he heard it. She certainly did not seem to approve of the room he had specially prepared to be her own boudoir; but then, at the same time, she had disagreed with the Colonel, and that gave him considerable satisfaction, for he spoke as though sure she would agree with him.

"*Chacun à son goût*," laughed Roche, lightly. "My gout decidedly inclines towards rainbow hues and modern improvements."

"It would not do for us all to like the same thing," remarked Miss Desmond, reflectively.

"No. I am inclined to think there would be a good deal of fighting in the world if we did—a good deal of blood spilled;" and the Colonel, as he spoke, eyed Hugh savagely, as he saw him whisper something into Lillian's

car which brought the blush to her cheek, and felt how much satisfaction it would afford him to put a bullet into his rival, to lay him low, so that he might never fear him again, never dread that the woman he coveted would become another's; and be lost to him for ever.

"That is out of your sanguinary ideas," laughed Annie.

"It is an idea that would be terribly realistic if fifty—only fifty men, out of all the millions in the world—set their minds upon having the same thing!"

"I dare say. You men are such queer creatures," and with that careless remark she followed her intended husband; and the rest of the party, who were going out to look at the far-stretching chase, where the Gordons of old had hunted and hunted in bygone days, and where the graceful deer herded, and the timid rabbits flew along amid the tawny bracken.

Lilian declined to accompany the rest, and wended her way to the library, and taking down a volume of the "Arabian Nights," sat in the cushioned recess of the bay window, gazing out dreamily at the sapphire sea, almost smooth as a mirror, save here and there where a sleepy wavelet danced along, and dashed noiselessly against the shore. She had not been there many minutes when she heard someone beside her, and, turning, found Hugh had left his guests and sought her. He was gazing down at her with all the tender love he felt for her in his honest heart, shining in his eyes, and the gaze disconcerted her a little. She half rose from her seat, as if wishing to escape what she knew was coming, and then sank back again.

"Am I intruding? Do I disturb some charming reverie which is pleasing to you?" he asked, almost timidly, for now that the great question had to be asked, he felt nervous and uncertain as to the success of his hopes—those hopes that he had cherished for many, many years.

"No," she answered, with some slight embarrassment. "I was not in a reverie; I don't know what I was thinking about."

"May I guess?" he queried, studying all the game of the handsome, well-poised head, with its wealth of raven hair, drawn straight past the beautiful shell-like ears, and knotted on the snowy neck.

"Oh, yes, if you like. You would never guess the truth, though," she added, hurriedly, "for I was thinking of ghosts."

"Of ghosts!" he repeated, in astonishment.

"Yes, and if I were of a nervous turn of mind, your noiseless approach might have alarmed me!"

"I trust it did not do so?"

"No. I am not nervous. Still I might have thought it was the spectre from the octagonal chamber come to pay me a visit. He is a dangerous fellow, is he not?"

"The country folk about here who believe in such things say so."

"And what crime did he commit?"

"Murdered his wife."

"How dreadful—no, I mean how delightful. To live in a house where a real murder has been committed, and a real ghost walks, has always been my ambition," she declared.

"Then that ambition can be gratified now, if you wish," said Hugh, quietly, seizing the opportunity she had most unintentionally afforded him.

"I—don't know what you mean," she stammered, looking round wildly for a means of escape. The depths of the feminine mind is indeed difficult to fathom; and though in the morning after the interview with her father she had wished for the opportunity of refusing him, and showing him his mistake with regard to her feelings, she now dreaded the proposal, and would have fled if she could.

"Let me explain then, dear Lilian," he began, in tender, manly tones; "this house may be yours, if you will do me the honour to accept it, ghost and all. In fact, I have had this unit in view for many months past—in

deed, ever since I knew my uncle had left it to me. I am not clever at courtierlike speeches, I cannot pay compliments; but believe me to be speaking the truth when I say that you are dearer to me than anything else on earth."

Lilian hardly expected such a sweeping confession from the man before her, yet his straightforward wooing pleased her; though she maintained a strict silence.

"All my hopes centre in you; life, I feel, will be worthless to me without you. I have planned out a future which must be shared with you," he went on, "or be a perfect blank. I have never had a thought for any other woman. You have been, you are, all in all to me. I rejoice in my inheritance simply because it gives me power to ask for your hand, to plead for your love sooner than I could if I had only had my judgeship in India. The affection I feel for you is not an evanescent passion that will fade after a while. Time will but strengthen it, and no man will ever, can ever care for you more."

The wilful girl was softened by his words. She let him take her hand in his, and stood with downcast eyes listening, half her indignation appeased.

"Are my hopes presumptuous, Lilian? Have I been too bold in thinking we might pass the future together as man and wife? I trust not, dear. I trust I have not deceived myself in believing that the girlish affection you bore me in the old days has ripened into something warmer, and tenderer."

This last speech was a mistake. The wound caused by her father's words that morning was touched; her pride aroused, a sense of humiliation came over her. He asked her out of pity, as he thought she could not live without him. Well, she would show him his mistake; and, drawing her hand from his clasp, she said, coldly,—

"I think you are a little too bold, a little too presumptuous."

"Lilian," he exclaimed, fixing his beautiful eyes on her full of reproach.

"Yes, I mean it. You have deceived yourself woefully in imagining that you are very dear to me. In future, when you intend to propose to a woman be sure she loves you first before you tell her so openly that she is dying of love for you," and with a gesture of scorn she swept out of the room, not deigning to cast another glance at him.

For a while Hugh stood motionless, robbed of the power of movement by the stunning shock of her refusal; then with a groan he groped his way to the table, and buried his head in his arms. It was a bitter blow to bear. He loved her so well; she was the best part of his life, and now he must live it without her. There was only one face in the whole world that could charm him, only one voice that made melody in his ear; and the face and voice were lost to him; would go to make sunshine in another man's home. Love had taught him a cruel lesson, one hard to learn, impossible to forget; the future was a blank, with no hope, no happiness to make existence desirable. He would have nothing but the memory of false hopes and bitter disappointment through all the long years that lay before him; a burden that was not pleasant to bear.

The drive back to the How was not particularly enjoyable to many members of the party. Hugh's blanched cheek told its tale to Mr. Lysaght, and for the first time since her birth he felt terribly angry with his daughter. Lilian was pale and subdued, and made no objection to Roche's suggestion that she should accompany him in his dogcart, which he had been canny enough to drive over in, thinking he might be able to induce her to go home alone with him, and thus have a good opportunity of putting the question, which he knew must be put before long, to stave off utter ruin.

He whipped up his high-stepping horse when he had tucked the rug round her, and soon the coach was far behind, which left him

free to say what he wanted, and, somewhat to his astonishment, a tremulous "yes" was the answer to his pleading.

He had hardly expected to win the prize for one asking, and his joy at his easy success was exuberant, even to the extent of kissing his fair fiancée, who shrank away strangely from his embrace, and who, when she alighted from the dogcart, went straight up to her own room, did not appear again downstairs, and passed the evening shedding bitter tears, and kissing a photograph of Hugh Gordon's which he had given her three years before. A strange occupation, surely, for the promised bride of another man!

CHAPTER IV.

That night, when the men were all congregated in the smoking-room, enjoying the soothing weed, Roche approached Hugh, and sat down beside him, an uncommon occurrence, as the two men in general mutually avoided one another.

"I am in luck, to-day," he began, with a sparkle in his dreamy eyes.

"Indeed!" said Gordon, lifting his heavy head, and looking up. "Backed the winning horse?"

"No, rather the winning mare," he replied, pointedly.

"The winning mare?"

"Yes. Congratulate me. I have won the prize we both strove for. Miss Lysaght has promised to be my wife."

A look of intense pain convulsed the younger man's handsome features for a moment, but recovering himself, he said quietly, with earnest sincerity,—

"I do congratulate you, with all my heart. You have won a noble girl, and if she loves you, you ought to be the happiest man on earth."

"If she loves me!" repeated the Colonel, "do you think she does not?"

"I suppose she must," replied the other, evasively, "or she would not have accepted you."

He filled his pipe again and puffed away in silence for a while, reflecting on sundry little stories that he had heard from time to time, as men will of each other, and which were decidedly not very creditable to the gallant Colonel.

Yet though he knew things, which, if told to their host, would inevitably prevent his giving his consent to the marriage, honour obliged him to be silent. He could not disparage; and try to blacken the man who was his rival, who had succeeded, where he, Hugh, had failed. That would be mean, dishonourable, but he writhed with agony as he thought of the life that lay before the woman he loved—a life full of misery and humiliation, which would be insupportable to her high spirit and wilful temperament. She would be neglected for other women, snubbed, abused, her money taken to pay her husband's greedy and rapacious creditors, and she, perhaps, reduced to absolute want. How the thought stung him, like the fang of a deadly serpent, and he was powerless to save her!

No, stay; there was one way. He knew that the Colonel from his embarrassed circumstances, was only going to marry her for the sake of the money she would inherit, that filthy lucre for which so many men and women sell themselves into bondage, dreary slavery, which ends only with their lives; he secretly knew nothing of Mr. Lysaght's intended marriage with a young woman.

This marriage would bring down Lilian's value as a monetary prize considerably bring it down so low, perhaps, that it might not be worth Roche's while to marry her. It was worth trying the experiment of telling the Colonel there was a chance of his promised bride having a whole brood of little brothers and sisters, who would share her fortune with her. So taking a long pull at his meerschaum he began—

"When is the happy day to be?"

"Eh! what?" said the Colonel, confusedly, looking up from a little calculation he was making on the back of an envelope as to how much it would take to keep Jeremiah Judah and Co. quiet until he had secured as absolutely his own goose that would lay the golden eggs for him.

"Has the day for your marriage been fixed?"

"No, not yet. I only proposed this evening, as we were coming back from your place."

"Indeed!"

That little word from Hugh spoke volumes.

"That was all. Of course, we have had no time as yet to make any arrangements."

"Hardly. I suppose you will not wait very long?"

"No. Why do you ask, though?"

"Because I thought if you had made up your mind that the knot should be tied soon both weddings would probably take place together, and make a double affair of it."

"Both weddings! What do you mean?"

There was an anxiety in the Colonel's dreamy eyes as he put the question.

"Haven't you heard about Mr. Lysaght?"

"No."

"He is going to be married next month to Miss Desmond."

"Oh, confound it!" broke from Roche's lips involuntarily; but recovering himself instantly he said with a smile that appeared to Hugh to be a ghastly travesty of mirth, "You don't say so?"

"Yes, it is a fact."

"I must go and congratulate him, then," and, rising, he sauntered off to their host, and stood chatting with him for a few moments, when he abruptly left the room, and sought the solitude of his own chamber.

He didn't care to have Hugh's keen eyes on his face after the shock he had received, so he withdrew from the observation of the man he knew he had supplanted, and alone in his room cursed his ill-luck in not having heard of Mr. Lysaght's intended marriage sooner.

"I must get out of it," he cried. "It will never do to marry her, and get a few paltry hundreds as her dower. I'd rather marry that Yorkshire widow I met in town last season, though she is fat, fair, and fifty; still her twenty thousand a year makes her quite handsome enough for me. The fair Lilian must excuse me. I'd rather not now. Still I must be cautious, and try to get her to do something that will give me a fair excuse for breaking the engagement, or I shall have her father and that fellow Gordon down on me," and with these thoughts the Colonel betook himself to his couch.

But little sleep visited his eyes. Before him seemed to stand his Israelitish creditors with threatening looks; and at last, despairing of getting any rest, he rose at day-dawn, and going to the stables knocked up a groom to saddle his horse, and went for a sharp gallop in hopes of dispersing the blues.

The party at the How were assembled round the breakfast table on his return, and some of the number looked as white and heavy-eyed as he did himself. Notably Hugh and Lilian, neither of whom had slept, remorse having been busy with her, and regret with him driving away the white-winged dove—sleep.

"How did you enjoy your gallop?" inquired Lilian, as the Colonel took the seat which by common consent was left vacant at her side.

"Very much. It is a glorious morning. I suppose you will come out for a ride by-and-by?"

"Not for a ride," she replied. "I am going to drive into Gloston this afternoon. Will you come with me?"

"I shall be delighted to do so," he answered, with great apparent delight, which, however, he was far from feeling, as he was wondering how soon he could decently get away from the How, and go to woo his Yorkshire widow, or rather her twenty thousand a year, which would come in so nicely for paying his many

and ever-increasing debts. "What are you going to drive?"

"My favourites—Bib and Tucker."

"What it is to be a favourite of yours?" he murmured, adding aloud, "The Arabs will be rather fresh, won't they? You have not driven them for some days."

"That will be all the better. I like to go along at a good pace."

"I don't think you ought to drive them, pussy," observed Mr. Lysaght, gravely.

"They are too spirited for a woman's hand."

"Not for me, dad," she expostulated, indignantly, for she was a good whip, and was proud of her prowess.

"Rogers doesn't seem to like them. He thinks Tucker decidedly dangerous, and that if he bolts Bib will follow suit."

"Rogers is an old goose," she declared, contemptuously, angry that her pets should be disparaged.

"He is far from that. I value his opinion highly, and have never known it to prove wrong."

"I think he is wrong with regard to my Arabs. They are such darlings, such beauties. I am sure there is not an atom of vice in them."

"I hope you will find it so, my dear," responded her father, seriously. "Still, I should advise you not to think lightly of what the old man says. His knowledge of horseflesh is very extensive, and you may be sure he has some good reason or reasons for saying what he does."

"No reason, I am sure, father, save that he would like to see me drive a pair of fat, waddling old cobs, that would trot two miles an hour, and that you know I never will do. Where would be the fun of driving animals of that sort? I like creatures full of life and spirit, that answer to the least touch of the rein, and I shall never drive any other kind," with which announcement, given in a very determined manner, Miss Lysaght rose from the table, and, getting a wrap, sauntered out with some of the other ladies, and passed the time till luncheon visiting the stables, and the kennels, and the pheasantry.

After lunch she came down, equipped for her afternoon expedition, and found Roche waiting for her in the hall.

"Is the phaeton here?" she asked.

"Yes. Bib and Tucker have just come to a standstill after no end of capering, and curvetting."

"A good gallop will take all that out of them," she said, confidently, as she mounted into the phaeton, and took the reins from Rogers, who ventured to say—

"Don't use the whip, missy. They won't stand it. They'll bolt, certain sure, if you do. They're main fresh."

"I can manage them," she answered, lightly; and as she spoke Hugh came hurriedly down the steps and laid his hand on the reins.

"Miss Lysaght," he said, earnestly, addressing her for the first time since she had left him in the library at the Hall, "let me beg of you not to drive these animals to-day; they are dangerous."

"Nonsense!" she replied, curtly, turning her head away that she might not encounter the glance of those blue eyes. "I am not afraid."

"You are risking your life!" he cried, with terrible anxiety, which he was powerless to conceal or repress. "Colonel Roche," he added, "will you not prevent her doing this reckless thing?"

"Certainly not," replied the Colonel, coolly, as he adjusted the rug over his knees. "I never attempt to interfere with ladies. I know the uselessness of it. Better let them have their own way."

"Not, surely, when their way means death?" he expostulated.

"Mr. Gordon, you are detaining us," she said, frigidly, as the young groom, Ted, got up. "Be good enough to take your hand off the reins, I am going to start," and she struck the horses a smart cut, at which they reared,

dragging the ribbons from Hugh's grasp, and then started off at a terrific pace.

The Colonel felt a little uneasy at first, though he was no coward; but after a time the Arabs settled down into an easy trot, which left their fair driver free to chat to her companion, which she did, striving to make herself agreeable to the man she was going to promise to "love, honour, and obey," and to chase away the black cloud that lowered on his brow.

She did not succeed; and after they left Gloston, on their homeward way, conversation failed somewhat; and she fell into a reverie, and was not on the alert, as she ought to have been.

The reins were slack, and as they passed the Yellowfield preserves a pheasant rose almost from under the horses' hoofs.

With a snort and shy of terror Tucker lowered his head, seized the bit in his teeth, laid back his ears, and bolted like the wind, carrying Bib with him in his first impetuous rush, and then being joined by him in the mad race.

On, on they tore—past hedges and ditches—past wood and field. On, on with untiring speed.

It was in vain the Colonel seized the reins and tried to wrench their heads round. They took no more notice of his efforts than if he had tried to guide them with a piece of silk.

"Sit still—sit still!" he cried, with one swift look at his companion's ashen face. "Don't move! Cling on firmly! They must tire themselves out soon. All will be well."

But it did not seem likely that all would be well unless their wild career was checked, for they had left the beaten track and were scudding over the common heading towards the chalk-pits, down one of which they must inevitably fling themselves, dealing death and destruction to those in the phaeton unless they could be stopped.

"Great heavens! what can I do?" muttered Roche through his clenched teeth, as they neared the first pit. "We are lost!"

But as he spoke, and gave up all hope, a man, who had been lying face downwards in the gorse, sprang up, and, throwing himself before the horses with a herculean effort, turned them aside, stopping them for a minute, which was time enough for the Colonel and the groom to spring out and assist Miss Lysaght to alight; then he stepped back, but not quickly enough, for as he released their heads they sprang forward, knocking him down, trampling him under their iron hoofs, and tore on—on till they reached the pit, when, with a horrid crash, horses and phaeton disappeared!

With a piercing shriek, Lilian flung herself beside the wounded man, and lifting his bloodstained head on to her knee, kissed the brow that was gashed by the iron hoofs, staunching the blood with her handkerchief, and called upon him loudly to look up and speak to her. Hugh Gordon gave no response to her pleadings. His eyes remained shut, there was a deathlike pallor on his cheek, and believing he was dead, dead through saying her, with another shriek she fell forward senseless on his breast.

It was near midnight when she recovered her senses, and found herself lying in her own bed at the How.

"What has happened?" she asked the maid who sat by her side, passing her hand confusedly over her forehead. "Ah! I remember," she added, with a shudder, "poor Hugh, Mr. Gordon—how—how is he? Is he dead?"

"Law, no miss. He ain't dead."

"Thank Heaven for that," she ejaculated, fervently. "And is he much injured—much hurt?"

"I think he is cut about a bit. Gashed like."

"Is he conscious?"

"No, miss."

"Help me to dress at once," she said imperatively, and, despite the expostulations

of the woman, she got up, and when dressed went to Hugh's room.

He was lying very still, looking like death, with his bandaged head; and struck with remorse and repentance at the mischief she had done, she fell on her knees by the couch, and prayed that his life might be spared. For days it seemed doubtful that he could recover; at last the change came, and he journeyed slowly back to life and health.

A fortnight after the accident Lillian received a letter from the Colonel, who had left the How on the plea of "urgent business," to say that he released her from her engagement to him, as, after seeing the fond way in which she had embraced Mr. Gordon, he could only arrive at the conclusion that he, Roche, was not the man she loved, or wished to marry.

"I am so glad—oh, I am so glad," she cried, joyfully, when she finished reading it. "I am free now to make amends to my poor darling, if he will let me."

"How is Hugh this morning?" asked Lillian of her father, some three or four weeks later, when they met at breakfast.

"Pretty well."

"Only pretty well?"

"That is all. The wounds have healed, and the broken ribs mended, but he seems to have little strength, and to be listless and dull. You had better go and see if you can cheer him, Pussy."

"I, dad!" she faltered.

"Yes; try and amuse him."

"Yes," and slowly she went towards the room he occupied—slowly and almost reluctantly, for she had never been alone with him since the day she had refused him, and had avoided him, thinking he might not care for her society, while really he craved for it as the flowers do for sunlight.

"At last!" he murmured, as he saw her enter.

"Is there anything I can do for you—to amuse?" she asked, confusedly.

"Yes," he replied, with the utmost composure, for he anguished wall from her blushes and confusion. "Come and sit here," pointing to a footstool at his feet, "and talk to me."

"Do you really wish me to stay with you?" queried, eagerly.

"Yes, most certainly I do. I have a great deal to say to you."

"And I also."

"Well, supposing you begin."

"I—I—want to ask you, Hugh, to forgive me for the way I acted towards you. I didn't mean it, indeed."

"Didn't mean what?" he asked, coolly.

"To—to—be unkind to you."

"To say 'no' when you meant 'yes,' dear?" he asked, tenderly.

"Yes," she answered, and the next moment she was hiding her blushing face on his breast, and he was whispering tender endearments into her ear, asking the old, old question over again, and getting a reply that fully satisfied him; for Lillian knew her own heart at last, knew that it had left her keeping, and that she could find no happiness in life apart from Hugh Gordon.

[THE END.]

CONVERSATION.—In the management of conversation avoid disputes. Arguments, as they are usually conducted, seldom end in anything else. If we have not the requisite patience, good feeling, and politeness to prevent this, let us defer arguing altogether. The attitude of a seeker after truth is the only one in which to argue, whereas most arguments are pursued simply to uphold an opinion already formed and to overthrow an antagonist. The habit of talking too much and consuming the time that should in fairness be given to another is a very common blot on conversation; so is that of interruption, and of obtruding matter known only to two or three into a large circle. Good taste and good feeling alike forbid these.

THROUGH DEEP WATERS.

—20—

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER THE STORM.

HAROLD VANE started to his feet in astonishment, thinking that he had misunderstood Hannah, or that she had made a mistake. Lord Templestowe was not likely to seek him out.

"I have had some work to find you," said the familiar voice, and then he knew that in very deed Muriel's cousin stood before him. "You have hidden yourself well."

"It has not been intentional hiding. Will you please be seated, my lord? Muriel is not here to receive you; she—"

"I know she is not here," the Earl said, gravely. "I made sure that she was not in before I intruded on you. I came to speak to you of her."

"Of her—of my wife!"

"Just so. Excuse me if I make sure that your estimable servant is not listening; what I have to say is for your ear alone."

He rose and went to the door, satisfying himself that Hannah was at a safe distance, as indeed she was, having retired to the kitchen, delighted that some one had come in who could talk to her master for awhile and amuse him a little.

"What about Muriel?"

"Much," was Lord Templestowe's answer.

"Where is she—do you know?"

"She is out. She goes a great deal amongst her former friends."

"So she tells you."

"Whatever she tells me is the truth, my lord."

"Don't be too sure of that. Look here, Vane. I have never forgiven my relative her marriage with you; but she has no right to make your affliction a cloak for her own misdoings."

"Take care what you are saying, Lord Templestowe; you are speaking of my wife!"

"Yes, and of my cousin's daughter; she is a worthy descendant of her father. There are some truths that must be told, Mr. Vane, and this is one of them. She has deceived you from first to last, and as my name has been brought forward in the business, I deemed it my duty to come to you and open your eyes a little to what is going on."

"Your name, my lord?"

"Yes; I find I am accredited with being the mysterious benefactor who enables her to flaunt it about in silks and velvets, and who has paid all your debts. Oh, you need not start like that, as if you did not know; they are paid, and my man of business has been made the medium of the settlements."

"Who has dared?"

"Is it possible you do not guess? Who did you supplant when you persuaded Muriel that the lot of a painter's wife was the most enviable on earth? She had a lover before you."

"I supplanted no one. Muriel had no lover."

"She has had one since her marriage," the Earl said, coarsely, "or gossip belies her. It is his Grace the Duke of Carnmath, Mr. Vane, who supplies the very bread you eat, the house that shelters you. It is he whom she has gone to meet day after day and evening after evening, making her old friend Lady Scrutton the excuse. I don't believe her ladyship would lend herself to anything wrong if she knew it, but she is good-natured and obtuse, and doubtless fancies Muriel is rich enough for all the extravagance she shows in her toilettes."

"I think you have been schooled into your words, my lord," Harold Vane said, quietly. "They sound more like your wife's than your own utterances."

Lord Templestowe winced uneasily. In truth, he had been tutored a little as to what he should say by that estimable lady.

"I am putting my own thoughts into

words," he said, somewhat sulkily. "If you do not care to hear me, Mr. Vane, I can go and leave matters to take their chance. The crash will be terrible when it comes, and it is coming."

"You may be honest," the blind man said. "I have no right to doubt you, but whoever invented these calumnies about Muriel lies! There is no other word for it. She has not seen the Duke of Carnmath for a long time. He is out of town."

"He chooses to have it thought so, but he is here; I have seen him, seen him with your wife within this hour. She is going with him somewhere to-morrow night, and she is to receive money from him—do you hear? money! You met her first in my house, and she is my kinswoman. Let me act for you in this business, and denounce this man for the villain that he is."

"I won't believe it—I can't," the artist said, clenching his hands and setting his white lips into a rigid line before he spoke again. "If I thought it, blind and helpless as I am, I would seek him out and strangle him. Heaven would give me strength. What shall I do? Heaven help me! what shall I do?"

"Follow her to-morrow and be convinced for yourself. I will be your escort. She is going to Lady Scrutton's, I know that much. Have you the courage to go there and be convinced?"

"I will go. Stay, repeat again what you said. The Duke of Carnmath is our unknown benefactor—is that it? I am indebted to him for the food I eat, the house that shelters me? Let me remember that, and then take me where I can meet him face to face, and—"

"For Heaven's sake be calm," the Earl said, in some alarm, for Harold Vane's face worked as if he were going into a fit. "It is true, nothing can alter it. My own lawyer has been a party to the deceit, and has the audacity to justify himself by saying that his secrecy shielded me from the obloquy of letting my cousin's daughter starve."

"Go, leave me, for Heaven's sake," the miserable man said, "I can bear no more. Come for me to-morrow night and prove this horrible thing to me, or I shall go mad, and kill you or myself."

"I will come for you at eight o'clock, Mr. Vane. If you have courage to keep what I have told you a secret, you shall know that I have spoken the truth."

Harold Vane felt as one who began to feel as if he had been dreaming, but a thousand little things that he remembered as having happened since Muriel took this strange, and seemingly heartless freak of going out and leaving him alone came into his mind, and convinced him that it was true. Yes, he would go and assure himself of her perfidy. Lord Templestowe would not fail him, but he could not meet her, he could not bear her kisses upon his lips to-night; he would go to bed and escape her greeting.

Muriel, coming home very soon after her cousin had departed, found her husband in bed, tired, he said, and too sleepy to talk to her, and she was so light-hearted, had enjoyed herself so much, and was so full of excitement she could not sleep.

"Only one night more," she kept saying to herself, "and I need keep nothing from him any longer. My darling, my darling, brighter times will come to both of us."

She looked at him as he tossed in troubled, worn-out sleep, and laid her lips lightly on his forehead. She was feverish and excited herself, and longed for the daylight, and when it came she rose and dressed herself.

"I shall sleep when it is all over," she murmured, "not before. I am going out twice to-day, dear," she said to her husband over their breakfast. "But it will be for the last time, I hope. I—"

"Don't apologise," he said, frigidly; "I must learn to do without you."

Her eyes filled with tears, but she made no remark.

"Only to-day," she said to herself; "only to-day!"

She came home in the afternoon after some three hours' absence, and gave him his tea and tended him, and took no notice of his coldness and severe speeches, though her heart was very full; and when she was dressed and ready for her evening's pleasure, she came to his side and stooped to kiss him. It was more than he could bear, and he pushed her away.

"Don't, for Heaven's sake!" he said, with a sharp pain in his voice. "I couldn't bear that!"

"Harold!" she said; "what has come to you?" But he would not answer her and she had no time to spare.

Punctual to the time he had mentioned Lord Templestowe came.

"Are you willing to come?" he asked; "or will you let this thing be?"

"No! A thousand times no. I will be satisfied!"

"You shall. She is at Lady Scrutton's and he too."

In spite of the servant's remonstrances, for she was horrified to see her master going out, Harold Vane was ready in a very few minutes and was driven away with his wife's cousin.

"If this horrible thing is true I shall die," he said, as they drove westward; "and I pray Heaven it may be soon."

They were just too late at Lady Scrutton's. She was out and Lady Muriel with her. She had gone to St. James's Hall to the great concert. The Duke of Carnmath was with them.

"Take me there!" said Harold Vane, passionately. "I cannot wait here till they return. I should go mad."

"It might be as well," Lord Templestowe thought. The music might have a soothing effect. He was beginning to be afraid of the demon he had evoked, and to wish that he had taken some other method of proving to this fiery, helpless creature that his wife was faithless.

The hall was very full. They had to wait at the door for some time, till there was some arrangement made about unoccupied seats, and while they were there someone brushed against Harold and turned with a little exclamation to apologise. In a second the artist had recognised the voice and caught the aggressor by the coat.

"I have you!" he exclaimed, in a choked voice. "Thank Heaven, I have you. You shall not escape me."

"For Heaven's sake, Vane, let go. This is not the time or place," Lord Templestowe said, hurriedly. "Your Grace, get out of his way; he is mad with anger against you, and—"

"And whose doing is it?" asked the Duke, for it was he. "Yours, my lord. You will be sorry for it by-and-by. Come in here; I can only stay a moment, but I must speak to you. To think that such a *contretemps* as this should have come about. If she should hear of it all will be lost."

He drew the two men into a side room as she spoke, and made Harold Vane sit down.

"You shall say what you will to me presently, Mr. Vane," he said. "I shall be at your service. I have a word to say to his lordship."

He drew the Earl aside and whispered to him earnestly for a minute or two, bringing a look of contrition to his face.

"If it is true I am awfully sorry!" he said.

"It is true. Come into the hall, and keep that lunatic quiet if you can."

He spoke to the people in attendance, and the gentlemen were provided with seats in a comfortable corner, where they would not be much observed. Harold Vane took but little notice of anything that his companion said to him. His heart was full of bitter longing for revenge.

"Do you see her?" he asked Lord Templestowe.

"Not yet. Ah, yes; there she is," he

answered, but his words were lost in the tempest of applause that greeted the singer who had just appeared on the platform. "Wait till the song is over, and I will tell you exactly where she is."

Was Harold Vane dreaming? Was all the misery of the last bitter time only a hideous nightmare, and was he at home listening to the glorious voice that was one of his faithless wife's greatest charms? It was her voice and none other, that was filling the great hall with melody, and enthralled the crowded audience, so that they listened in a stillness that might have been death till the song ceased and she retired. Then the applause went up again—shout after shout, till she was forced to come back and sing again; and Harold clutched his companion's arm with a frantic grip.

"What does it mean? Where am I?" he asked.

"You are in St. James's Hall, and I have been an ass," was the contrite reply. "Come round with me. I understand it all now."

They went round to the artist's room where Muriel sat with Lady Scrutton by her side and the Duke of Carnmath in attendance, with several other people admiring and congratulating. They retreated when they saw who was with the Earl, and Muriel sprang to her husband and put her arm round his neck.

"Darling?" she exclaimed. "How did you get here? Ah! I did not dare to tell you till it was over lest I should fail. But I have not failed, my own. And there shall be no more poverty for you, no more discomfort, Harold, dear. I have gone nearly mad with worry at having to keep a secret from you, but our friends thought it best. How good of them to tell you and bring you at the last minute! But I am glad I did not know. I should have broken down, I am sure."

She turned to greet Lord Templestowe, but he shrank back a little with a contrite look on his face.

"I have been so near doing incalculable mischief, Muriel," he said, gravely; "that I don't feel worthy to touch your hand, child. The world has been busy with your name, my dear, and I believed it, and—"

"And brought Harold here to hear you sing, and prove to him that it was all false," the Duke said, with a meaning look. "All's well that ends well, you know, my lord; and Lady Muriel's experiment has ended well. 'Miss Maxton' will have no lack of engagements from this night, I am sure."

So the mighty secret was out. Muriel had conceived the idea of turning her splendid voice to account, and had taken counsel with her old friend Lady Scrutton, and had studied and "come out" as a concert singer. The Duke of Carnmath had entered heartily into the scheme, and had been instrumental in getting her engaged and introduced to the best men in the musical profession, and the result had been a perfect success.

It is all many years ago now. "Miss Maxton" has almost given up her profession. She has made a fortune, and her husband, despite his blindness, has shown that even the deprivation of a sense cannot ruin a man's life. Waking from his dream of revenge against an innocent man roused him from the lethargy that was creeping over him, and nerved him to try and make a place for himself amongst the literary giants of the age. He is known as one of the highest authorities on colour that ever published a book, and his study is the gathering-place of the most talented people of the day.

The little home in Brixton has given place to a fine house close to Regent's-park, with a music-room which is the delight of all who have the *entree* there. Lord Templestowe, an old man now, has long since been forgiven, and found a haven of rest in Muriel's dainty home, for his wife grows more shrewish than ever as she grows older, and he is glad to escape sometimes.

Hither come also his Grace of Carnmath, with his gentle wife and pretty children, who are especial favourites of the blind master of the house, and to whom Ernest Chandos often

tells the tale of how Mr. Vane came to St. James's Hall to kill him, and found a fortune there instead; and the little ones look at the white-haired gentleman who is so fond of them, and wonder if he could ever have been angry enough with their papa to wish to kill him.

Muriel never quite understood the tempest of rage and despair that had made her husband's life so wretched for a time. She only knows now how sweet a thing it is to be sheltered from all life's storms in the haven of his great love.

[THE END.]

CUPS AND SAUCERS.—The latest shape for coffee cups is square—the latest decoration wild flowers, apparently growing up from the base of the cup, all around it. Tea cups, for five o'clock tea, vie with after dinner coffees in beauty, and come in the costliest porcelains. Fortunately for people who cannot afford such luxury, the artistic revival is manifest in the cheapest wares, and even earthen jugs and bowls are no longer ugly. Very pretty sets may be had quite cheaply, but the wisest choice for every day use by people of small means, is plain white French china, which, when broken, may easily be replaced. With this may be used any bits of coloured glass or china, which one may possess. A majolica dish or jug, bread plate or salad bowl, gives colour at small expense, while the gay Russian bowls in red and gold answer admirably for crackers or fruit.

SELF-POSSESSION.—There is a vain self-confidence which rushes unabashed into every scene, and feels equal to undertake whatever is presented. This, however, is very different from self-possession which comes from a true estimate of our powers. He who possesses himself in this latter sense will be as careful to abstain from what he is unable to perform as to execute whatever rightly falls to his lot. He will be modest and unassuming as he is energetic and unflinching, for he will know his limitations as well as he does his powers. The best practical way of securing this self-possession, where we feel its lack, is in continual practice. There are certain things which everyone should be prepared to do, certain scenes that every one should be prepared to enter, certain crises that every one should be ready to meet. These none of us must shrink from when they come, but do our best every time, resolutely calling to our aid all the reason and good sense that we can command. Each time we force ourselves to this course the task grows easier, and at length we arrive at that condition of calm assurance with regard to our performance of them which alone gives self-possession.

THE OMISSION OF A COMMA.—Some years ago the omission of a comma in a letter in the *Times* gave a horrible meaning to a sentence. The letter is on the American war, and the writer says: "The loss of life will hardly fall short of a quarter of a million; and how many more were better with the dead than doomed to crawl on the mutilated victims of this great national crime." "It should have been: "than doomed to crawl on, the mutilated victims of this great national crime." The following sentence appeared in a newspaper a short time ago: "The prisoner said the witness was a convicted thief." This statement nearly caused the proprietors of the newspaper some trouble, and yet the words were correct. When their attention was drawn to the matter, and proper punctuation supplied, the sentence had an exactly opposite meaning: "The prisoner, said the witness, was a convicted thief." Dean Alford says that he saw an announcement of a meeting in connection with the "Society for Promoting the Observance of the Lord's Day which was founded in 1831," giving the notion that the day, not the society, was founded in that year. A comma should have been after "day" and then the sentence would have been correct.

FACETIAE

A HARD CASE.—A watch's.

MAN OF LETTERS.—A sign-painter.

BAD NAME FOR A MILKMAN.—Gottschalk.

A "ROUND SUM" OF MONEY.—A penny.

THE BOAT BURST.—Hence the wrath of his countryman.

WHEN does a ship become a horseman?—When it rides at anchor.

WHEN is a kiss like rumour?—When it goes from mouth to mouth.

TO the condemned man the sheriff is he most dreaded of all collars.

WHY is the North Pole like an Illinois whisky manufactory? Because it is a secret still.

RECKLESS says his wife, is the light-wait champion: She always stays up till he comes home.

"This is prop. her position," said a young man, as he placed his arm around a maiden's waist.

MARRIAGE promotes longevity among men, notwithstanding its tendency to produce premature baldness.

FAMOUS, ALL.—There was a court-martial held on a young officer who had gone on a spree and had a fight in a tavern. The tavern proprietor was brought before the court and put in the witness-box. The prisoner was placed in full view.—"Witness, do you recognise the prisoner?"—"Yes, your Honour, and most of the court."

GRANDPA.—A little boy of six years was sent one morning to call his grandfather to breakfast. The old gentleman snored hard, and, as the little boy, pushed open the door, he was frightened at the unusual noise. He rushed back to his mother, exclaiming, "Mamma, grandpa has been barking at me!"

HONOR CHARITABLE.—"Madam," he began, as he lifted his hat at the front door. "I am soliciting for home-charities. We have hundreds of poor, ragged, and vicious children like those at your gate, and our object is—"

"Sir, those are my own children!" she interrupted; and the front door was violently slammed.

DIFFERENT EFFECTS OF RELIGION.—Wife: "What a number of ladies there was at church this morning wearing sealskin jackets. I counted no less than twenty-seven."—Husband (who won't see the point): "Do you think that is the proper way to occupy one's mind while at church?" I didn't notice a single one.—Wife: "No, one can scarcely be expected to notice such things when one's asleep."

A COLLECT-ON-DELIVERY YOUNG MAN.—A fashionable young man of a beautiful village, who is of a very economical turn, has the habit, when he sends a note to his girl of adding this postscript:—"Give the boy a biscuit for carrying this note." Recently the young lady promptly sent the young man quite a number of biscuits, informing him that he could henceforth prepay postage, and when the ration was exhausted to draw on her for more. A cold wave now blows between that young lady and her collect-on-delivery young man.

CONVULSIONS is said to have compelled a poet to retire from a certain club. His last remark there was the trying on in succession of all the hats that hang in the hall. On finding that one would not fit he would throw it down and trample it under foot, exclaiming, "No, that isn't mine!" until the head-gear of all the unassuming members inside strewed the passage.—"If you please, sir," said the always respectful footman, "what are you looking for?"—"My hat—my hat!" said the poet. There came the information:—"If you please, sir, I noticed that, when you came in, you hadn't one on."

"On late years," says Mrs. Partington, "my physician has taken to confounding his own physics."

The young man who always finds something good in the newspaper is he who carries his lunch wrapped up in it.

A FARMER now travels now much faster than it did formerly. The invention of the telegraph accounts for the increased speed.

They are going down to dinner. He: "May I sit on your right hand?" She: "Oh better take a chair!" He takes one.

SOMEBODY wants to know why newspapers will persist in abbreviating a Sea of Temperance and making an S.O.T. of him.

"WELL," said an Irish attorney, "if it please the Court, if I am wrong in this, I have another point that is equally conclusive."

Don't fret if you "cannot go into society." The oyster is often present at a supper when it would perhaps prefer to be at home in bed.

A NASHION gazed intently at a giraffe for a few moments, and, turning sadly away, sighed, "Oh, if I had a neck like that, what a collar I would wear."

"I HAVE neither time nor inclination to pass paragonics on the deceased," remarked a funeral orator. "Panegyrics," corrected a person present. "As you please, sir," remarked the orator, stiffly; "the words are anonymous."

WAITER (to cook): "George, the gent at No. 3 says as 'is potatoes ain't good—says as they've all got black eyes on 'em." George (real name Patrick): "Bedad, thin, it's no fault o' mine. The spalpeens must have been foightin' after I put them into the pot."

LANDLADY: "Did you like the turkey we had yesterday, Mr. Smith?" Mr. Smith: "Did I like him? Yes, indeed; why, I loved him! I used to think when I was a little child that perhaps, after all, I should live the longest, and the thought made me sad."

"Are you tired?" asked a young lady of her escort, as he suddenly sat down on the floor of the roller-skating rink. "No-o-o," he stammered, "b-b-but I th-th-think th-th the w-w-wheels of th-th these s-s-skates are t-t-too er-er-round, did-don't-cher-know."

HAROLD, Charlie! How are you getting on?—"Oh, very nicely! I'm travelling now, you know."—"Are you?"—"Yes; I'm an advance agent."—"Well, what do you do?"—"Oh! I go to a town, and when I can get an hotel-keeper to advance me a little money, I go to another."

"Jack, I thought you said that the pretty, fair-haired woman we saw walking with Smith was his wife?"—"So she is."—"O, pshaw! You must be mistaken. Why, I saw him at the museum last night pick up her fan, and smile and bow, as he handed it to her."

A LETTER TOO MUCH TO EXPECT FROM GRANDMOTHER.—"Edward, what do I hear—that you have disobeyed your grandmother, who told you just now not to jump down those steps?"—"Grandma didn't tell us not to papa; she only came to the door and said, 'I wouldn't jump down those steps, boys;' and I shouldn't think she would—an old lady like her!"

A STORY is related of a very recent occurrence, the characters in which are an oldish lady of fortune, a middle-aged gentleman (her son), and the lady's maid, young and pretty. The gentleman was pressing his suit warmly, and called every evening. But once unfortunately, when arriving to pay his customary devoirs, the door was opened by the pretty maid, and she received ardent vicarious attention from the visitor. The elder lady, however, was on the stairs, and observing what Sam Weller called "that ere little man-couvre," calmly observed:—"Annette, how often must I tell you that I positively insist upon your receiving your friends in the kitchen?" That ended it.

It seems absurd to write a book in this country and then have it bound in Morocco.

As a man drinks he generally grows reckless; in his case, the more drinks the fewer scruples.

"WEALTH has its cares as well as poverty," said the moralist.—"Give me the wealth cares!" cried the spendthrift.

"UNCLE," said a sweet girl of sixteen, "is love blind?"—"Yes, my dear, especially when the other party is rich."

"COURTIN'," says Artemus Ward, "is like strawberries and cream—wants to be dild slow; then you git the flavour."

DOCTOR (engaged six months after the death of his first wife, soliloquising over a letter): "This is better. She addresses me as 'You dear, darling duck.' My first wife used to speak of me as 'nasty old quack.'"

LATEST FROM OUR DOMESTIC REPORTER.—"I suppose," he remarked, as he returned from the barber's with his hair cropped closely to his head, "you will call attention to the size of my ears?"—"Oh, no," she replied sweetly, "that would be altogether unnecessary, dear!"

At YOUNGSTER, in passing the old home from which the family had been removed for some time, and which the lad had often had pointed out to him as the home in which he and his little brothers had been born, on seeing it removed preparatory to the erection of a new one; surveyed in silence for a few moments the changed scene, and then said pathetically, "Oh, papa, we weren't here nowhere now, were we?"

YOUNG WIFE: "I am determined to learn at what hour my husband comes home at night, yet, do what I will, I cannot keep awake, and he is always careful not to make a particle of noise. Is there any drug which produces wakefulness?" Old Wife: "No need to buy drugs. Sprinkle the floor with tacks."

CAUSE FOR DISLIKE.—A physician, walking with a friend, said to him:—"Let us avoid that pretty little woman you see there on the left. She knows me, and casts on me looks of indignation. I attended her husband." Ah! I understand. You had the misfortune to despatch him."—"On the contrary," replied the doctor, "I saved him!"

TRAMP: "Please give me something to eat. I've not had a warm mouthful of solid food for a week."—"Here, my good man, is a plate of nice hot soup for you," replied the cook—"Hot soup!" he howled. "Haven't you got anything else? This makes the fifth plate of hot soup I've had in the last hour. It is not healthy to put so much soup into an empty stomach."

LEGION OF BROTHERS.—In the west of England the fortunes of children are believed to be much regulated by the day of the week on which they are born. Here is a rhyming adage on the subject, common about Tavistock:—Monday's child is fair in face, Tuesday's child is full of grace, Wednesday's child is full of woe, Thursday's child has far to go, Friday's child is loving and giving, Saturday's child works hard for his living. And a child that's born on a Christmas Day is fair and wise, good and gay.

THE BORROWING FAMILY.—The borrowing family sent their boy Jack over to Mrs. Murphy's to borrow some tea and sugar and a plate of butter. Mrs. Murphy was busy, and had no inclination to lend to neighbours who never returned anything they borrowed. At the same time she did not care to offend them entirely.—"I'd be glad to accommodate ye," she said politely; "but o'm in a hurry, and haven't the time to wait on ye. I've other fish to fry just now." The boy went home and reported that Mrs. Murphy was too busy to attend to him, and had other fish to fry, &c.—"And why didn't ye wait?" asked his mother breathlessly. "Go back, and take another plate with you, and tell Mistress Murphy you're in no hurry, and mother'd be much obliged to her for a plate of the fried fish!"

SOCIETY.

THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT will attend the Durbar at Rawal Pindi, on the occasion of the reception of the Amir, and his return to Europe is doubtful.

A MARRIAGE will shortly take place between the Hon. Rollo Russell, youngest son of Countess and the late Earl Russell, and Alice Godfrey, daughter of Mrs. and stepdaughter of Major-General Buller.

THE KENNEDY'S SONS, Prince Abbas Bey and Prince Makhmet Ali Bey, are expected in England next May, and will remain for some time in this country, where they may probably receive their education.

THE MARRIAGE of Princess Caroline Mathilde of Schleswig-Holstein with Prince Frederick Ferdinand of the Glucksburg line took place at Prinknash, in Shropshire, on the 18th ult., among the guests being the bride's sister, Princess William of Germany, and her husband; also Prince and Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein. The wedding dress was of white satin with a velours frill train in which silver threads were introduced. Immediately after the marriage the newly-wedded pair started for Louisaend, on receipt of intelligence that the father of the bridegroom's brother of the King of Denmark, was hopelessly ill.

A HANDSOME MARBLE MONUMENT or tablet has recently been erected in the old parish church at Watford, to the memory of the late Countess of Essex (the celebrated prima donna; Katherine Stephens), who died in Feb., 1882, at the age of 91. The memorial is executed in pure white Carrara marble, and is elaborately ornamented with Corinthian columns and capitals and richly carved mouldings. Above the corner surmounting the inscription these words are carved on a panel:—

"Rest undisturbed within this peaceful shrine
Till angels wake thee with a note like thine."

LADY BRAMFORD has consented to a novel exhibition being held on Thursday, May 21st, and Friday, May 22nd, at 82, Lancaster-gate. It will consist of a miniature Mme. Tussaud's exhibition, with prize needlework and cake competition, for the seventy-eight branches of the Girls' Friendly Society in the Diocese of London. The prizes are offered for the best cake, and for plain work made by members of the society. The miniature Mme. Tussaud's exhibition will consist of small historical groups of kings, queens, and celebrities of England in the correct costume of the period, and in attitudes expressive of some great crisis in their lives. If possible, the groups are to be copied from celebrated pictures. Mrs. Symes Thompson invites the assistance of ladies who understand modelling to contribute a figure or group to this novel show. Painted backgrounds would be also gratefully accepted.

At the recent Drawing Room the dresses were exceptionally magnificent. Among them may be noticed that of the Princess of Wales, who wore a dress of black tulle embroidered in jet, looped with a large cluster of shaded mauve clematis; train of black grande Stille and satin brocade trimmed with jet to correspond. Headdress, a tiara of diamonds, feathers, and veil; ornaments, diamonds. Orders, Victoria and Albert, the Crown of India, St. Catherine of Russia, St. John of Jerusalem, the Order of the Red Cross, and the Danish Family Order. The Princess was, beyond a question of doubt, the handsomest woman at Court. The Princess Beatrice wore a pale mauve dress, and train trimmed with valenciennes lace and bunches of wood violets. Headdress, feathers, veil, and diamond bees; pearl and diamond ornaments; the Riband and Star of St. Catherine of Russia, and the Victoria and Albert, the Crown of India, the Royal Red Cross, and the Saxe-Coburg and Gotha Family Orders.

STATISTICS.

FISH HATCHING in Norway.—Norway is turning scientific pisciculture to account by hatching great numbers of lobsters and fish. From 7,000,000 fish chiefly cod and haddock, hatched last year, the number has increased this winter to 50,000,000 or 60,000,000. The work has thus far been done by a private association, but the Government is expected to aid in the future, in view of its obvious benefit to the national interests.

ACREAGE OF THE LONDON PARKS.—Hyde Park contains 360 acres; Kensington Gardens, 200; St. James's and the Green Parks together, 151; Regent's Park, 403; Victoria Park (before the late small addition), 280; Battersea Park, 200; Greenwich Park, 174; Crystal Palace (as originally laid out, 400 acres, reduced to) 108; Alexandra Park (as at first laid out, 500 acres, reduced to) 192; Clapham Common, 100; Wandsworth, 302; Wimbledon, 629; Barnes, 120; Epping Forest, over 5,000; Kensington Park, 15; Camberwell, 5 acres.

GEMS.

WHEN you are looking at a picture, you give it the advantage of a good light. Be as courteous to your fellow-creatures as you are to a picture.

There should be, methinks, as little merit in loving a woman for her beauty as in loving a man for his property; both being equally subject to change.

He that waits for an opportunity to do much at once may breathe out his life in idle wishes; and regret, in the last hour, useless intentions and barren zeal.

Each human life is a crystal rather than a surface; it has many faces, and each face seems to him who sees it a complete life; and yet all the faces form but a part of the one life whose depths are concealed from sight.

CERTAIN insects assume the colour of the leaves they feed upon; they are but emblems of a great law of our being. Our minds take the hue of the subject whereon they think. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is."

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

WARTS.—An old recipe for the removal of warts is to rub them three or four times a day with common table-salt, applying a little water to the wart before the salt is put on. Let it remain ten minutes before brushing it off. This, if faithfully done, is said to remove the wart and leave no scar.

LITTLE BAKED CUSTARDS.—Eight well-beaten eggs, leaving out two whites for frosting; three pints of milk; sweeten and flavour to taste; bake in custard cups; beat the reserved whites to a stiff froth with a little sugar; spread over the top, and return to the oven to brown.

FRUIT HAMS.—Wash carefully, then let stand in salt and water to draw out the blood. Cut up as you would a chicken, dry each piece in a cloth, dip into flour, and fry in hot butter or dripping. A cream gravy of rich milk thickened with flour and butter, then well seasoned and poured over the ham, makes a tempting dish, with but little to distinguish it from chicken if perfectly sweet and fresh.

TO TEST WATER.—A scientist gives the following simple remedy of testing the purity of water:—"To test the purity of water there has been found no better or simpler way than to fill a clean pint bottle three-fourths full of the water to be tested, and dissolve in the water half a teaspoonful of the purest sugar-leaf or granulated white sugar—cork the bottle, and place it in a warm place for two days. If in twenty-four to forty-eight hours the water becomes cloudy or milky, it is unfit for domestic use."

MISCELLANEOUS.

LOVER'S GIFTS.—There is, after all, something in those trifles that friends bestow on each other which is an unfailing indication of the place the giver holds in the affection: I would believe that one who preserved a lock of hair, a simple flower, or any trifle of my bestowing, loved me, though no show was made of it; while all the protestations in the world would not win my confidence in one who sets no value on such little things. Trifles they may be; but it is by such that character and disposition are oftenest revealed.

NEVER SAY DIE.—The old German proverb, "Old love never rusts," has been singularly verified in the case of an old bachelor of sixty-seven who was recently united at St. Peter's-burg with the lady of his choice, aged sixty. They first confessed their mutual affection at the respective ages of twenty-five and eighteen, but their poverty was a barrier to the happy consummation of their wishes. He is now the owner of considerable house-property, and she has saved up 500 roubles. How their faces beamed with delight on receiving the priestly benediction!

OLD SHOES.—Even old shoes are valuable. They are cut up in small pieces, and these are put for a couple of days in chloride of sulphur, which makes the leather very hard and brittle. After this is effected, the material is washed in water, dried, ground to powder, and mixed with some substance which makes the particles adhere together, as shellac, good glue, or thick solution of gum. It is then pressed into moulds, and shaped into combs, buttons, knife-handles, and many other articles.

SECRETS.—We must regard every matter as an intrusted secret which we believe the person concerned would wish to be considered as such. Nay, further, we must consider all things as secrets intrusted which would bring scandal upon another if told, and which it is not our certain duty to discuss, and that in the presence of the accused. The divine rule of doing as we would be done by is never better put to the test than in matters of good and evil speaking. We may argue with ourselves upon the manner in which we would wish to be treated in many circumstances; but everybody recoils instinctively from the thought of being spoken ill of in his absence.

GIRLS' AMBROSIA.—Young English girls have little more to say than French damsels, though they are by no means kept under such severe restraint. It has been suggested that the French girls say nothing, because they are not permitted to speak; while the English girls say nothing because they have nothing to say. They are very sweet and simple and modest, but they lack that suspicion of harmless "fastness" which some folk find so attractive in their American sisters. They have much taste in fancy work, and English homes are prettily decorated with satin cushions, mantel-piece draperies, etc., painted by hand in water-colours or with fine and delicate embroideries, the handiwork of the ladies of the family. They ride well and are devoted to lawn-tennis and other out door games, and in the main are a healthy, happy race, physically superb, but lacking mental brilliancy and charm. It is perhaps for this reason that the married state in England differs so widely from the same institution in America. Here is a monarchy, while with us it is a republic. The English husband is an autocrat, and admits of no discussion respecting his decrees. The household and its movements are regulated to suit his whims and convictions; and his wife and daughters must shape their actions accordingly. But there is plenty of warm mutual love manifested between husbands and wives in England, and so matrimony here far more resembles the same institution with us than does the wedded state in France.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ELLA.—We should think it was more nauseous than injurious.

HOUSEWIFE.—The address of the Charity Commissioners is Gwydyr House, Whitehall, London.

CYCLINDER.—Easter Monday, 1885, came on the 31st of April.

VICTORIA.—Dark brown hair. Much obliged for your opinion of the stories.

A TROUBLED ONE.—Apply to the Warden of the Magdalen Hospital, Stratham, London.

C. W.—The writing is neat and careful, but too small to be fashionable. Brown hair and eyes match very well.

CONSTANT READER.—1. Please choose initials or some other non de plume in future. 2. Not altogether too tall, but quite tall enough. 3. Very good writing.

N. POLE.—It is probably a diminutive or nickname for Henrietta, which is the feminine of Henry, meaning rich at home.

N. R. A.—The marriage made by you while known under the assumed name is perfectly legal. 2. Your penmanship is quite creditable.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—1. Live moderately and take plenty of exercise. 2. About a shilling a day. 3. We are glad you like the story. 4. Impossible to say at present.

SMOKER.—No one under twenty-one years of age can be sued for breach of promise of marriage. As a matter of courtesy the presents should be returned, but it makes no difference as regards the action.

VEILLER.—Are you sure the pictures are oil-paintings and not coloured prints? If they are oil-paintings we presume the inscription means that they have been engraved and the engravings published. Is the name "Gainsborough"?

M. B. M.—1. Most improper. "Always be off with the old love before you get on with the new." 2. Certainly unless she seriously misconducts herself. 3 and 4. Yes. 5. Both absurd, that tied with green the darker shade of the two.

S. M.—If complete it is of some value, but a good deal depends upon the particular edition. Write to the Principal Librarian of the British Museum, Great Russell-street, Bloomsbury, giving full particulars as to date and publisher.

DIKAR.—1. Dynamite should be pronounced as spelt, not as if written "dynamite," dynamite with the accent on the "nam." 2. The sentence is incomprehensible to us. Probably you have not written it correctly.

C. R. A.—We certainly cannot give you the desired information; the so-called medical book in question may be a genuine scientific work by a properly qualified practitioner, or the spurious catchpenny of a charlatan, for aught we know.

AMY E. T.—When a lady has been regularly introduced to a gentleman, and becomes sufficiently intimate with him to accept his company to church, she would not be acting improperly by asking him to call upon her at any time agreeable to both. Good penmanship.

A. G. G.—The price paid by any manufacturing company for materials used by them is a private matter as far as the general public is concerned. Persons having such material for sale should, therefore, put themselves in direct communication with the ones with whom they desire to negotiate.

A. S. D.—1. The best way would be to write to her frankly, and tell her your wish. You will judge of her feelings towards you by her answer. 2. The wife would take a third, and the remaining two-thirds would be divided between all the children, share and share alike in equal proportions.

ANXIOUS TO IMPROVE.—1. There are many very cheap handbooks on shorthand. Any bookseller would get you one. 2. It is not at all easy to learn the violin without a master. Join a musical society. Any music publisher will provide you with a cheap instruction book.

W. X. Y. AND M. M. A.—1. Neither vinegar nor Mnejuise is a good thing to reduce stoutness, but if taken in any but small quantities are both likely to prove injurious to the system. The best way is to live sparingly, chiefly on animal food, avoid stimulants, and all starchy foods, such as rice, pastry of any kind, too much bread and vegetables, especially potatoes, and above all take plenty of good, hard, outdoor exercise. 2. Squeeze them out and apply a little dilute spirits of wine, at the same time keeping the system in good order by temperance and the use of occasional alternative medicine. We have no faith in the advertised nostrums, especially for such simple matters.

M. C. E.—Ancient Ethiopia extended from Assuan in Egypt southward along the Nile somewhat beyond Khartoum, where Gordon and El Mahdi occupied attention. The people were not blacks. They are described by ancient writers as remarkable for personal beauty, of dark complexion, finely formed. At one time they ruled Egypt with an Ethiopian dynasty of kings. So, and Tinnak, Egyptian kings, were Ethiopians. This people were descendants of Ham, and as such were especially offensive to the Israelites, who might have resented Moses' marriage with a Gentile of the Gentiles. But in the matter referred to (in Numbers

xli. 1), where the Ethiopian wife is mentioned, it seems probable that Miriam was jealous of her prominent position in the priestly family, and persuaded Aaron to try to arouse the national feeling and depose Moses. The effort failed, and she was prominently punished as the chief conspirator.

N. G. T.—The strict signification of the word "polytechnic" is comprehending many arts. It is applied particularly to a school in which many branches of art or science are taught, especially with reference to their practical application.

ELFRIDA.—Glycerine can be used for the preservation of medicines where the solvent properties of alcohol are not required. This latter, however, prevents fermentation to a greater degree than glycerine, and is therefore generally used in medicinal compounds possessing that property.

VERA.—1. There is no way by which the appearance of your lips can be improved, unless you stop biting them. 2. A portfolio suitable for holding sheet music can be obtained from a music-seller. It would also be advisable to have the music bound in volumes with limp covers containing fifty or sixty pieces, thus preserving them for many years.

"THE KISS AND THE SMILE."

She stood in her beauty, pale and still—

The roses were blowing in June—

And he was angry and stubborn of will,

Though it was yet the honeymoon.

"I am sure," she said, "that the thing is so."

He answered, "It cannot be;

One of us two must be wrong, you know,

And it certainly is not me."

"You are not infallible, my dear."

I was watching the whole day long;

You may say what you like, the thing is clear,

You are certainly in the wrong."

I am only a woman, that I know."

But I think I can trust my slight;

And whether you own it is so, or no,

I am certainly in the right."

He looked at his fair young wife, and then

He spoke in a kinder key:

"Few women can know as much as men,

And you promised to honour me,

But if I am sure, and you are sure,

And neither will fault admit,

There's only one way, peace to secure—

Now which of us ought to submit?"

She looked at the red rose in her hand,

And then in her husband's face;

And then on a little golden band,

And a better thought grew apace.

"The one that is prouder and wisest," she said,

"The folly and pride will diminish."

And then she lifted her fair, young head,

And gave him a smile and a kiss.

She was the victor; she knew she had won,

When he folded her to his breast,

And told her, "the thing that she had done

Had made him of husbands most blest,"

For she that is wise, must stoop to rise,

Then love will submission requite;

The kiss on the lips, and the smile in the eyes,

Makes any wife "certainly right."

L. B. R.

W. C. R.—1. No. Marshal Ney, the celebrated French soldier, was born at Saalouis, Lorraine. On Napoleon's abdication, April 11, 1814, Ney gave his allegiance to Louis XVIII., who made him a peer of France, but on Napoleon's return to power he again joined the latter, and with him entered Paris, March 20, 1815. After the battle of Waterloo, he was proscribed by the king, tried by court-martial and sentenced to death. He was shot in Paris on Dec. 7, 1815. 2. Marshal Murat, after the disastrous battle at Leipzig, broke with Napoleon, but subsequently declared in his favour. He was captured, tried before a Neapolitan military commission, and condemned to be shot. He was executed in October, 1815.

W. J. S.—The American steamship *Savannah* was the first to cross the Atlantic. She sailed from Savannah in 1819 to Russia, touching at England on her way out, but on her return she came direct from St. Petersburg to New York in twenty-six days. She did not use steam all the way, being sometimes under sail. The first steamer to leave Great Britain for America was the *Sirius*, a vessel of seven hundred tons, which sailed from Cork on April 4th, 1838; the *Great Western*, one thousand three hundred and forty tons, sailed from Bristol on April 8; both steamers arrived in New York on the 23rd, the *Sirius* in the morning and the *Great Western* in the afternoon. The first vessel of the Cunard Line was the *Britannia*, one thousand three hundred and fifty tons, which left Liverpool July 4th, 1840.

AMATEUR FLORIST.—The art of arranging bouquets is quite simple. After collecting the flowers to be used on a tray, strip all the superfluous leaves from the stems, and place the flowers side by side so as to see the order in which they can be most attractively displayed. A very pretty hand-bouquet can be made by taking a small, straight stick, not over a quarter of an inch in diameter. Tie a string to the top of it, and begin by fastening on a few delicate flowers, or one large, handsome one, for the centre piece, winding the string about each stem as you add the flowers and leaves to the bouquet. Always place the flowers with

the shortest stems at the very top, reserving all those with long stems for the base, and complete the bouquet with a fringe of finely cut foliage. Then cut all the stems evenly, wrap damp cotton about them, and cover the stems with a paper cut in pretty lace designs. In making bouquets from garden flowers, such as are most easy to procure, the flowers can be arranged flatly and a background made from sprays of evergreens.

TYRO.—In taking wine with a friend it is not now customary to make use of any complimentary phrase, though a slight bow or inclination of the head may be made. The name "Milan" is pronounced Mi-lan, with the accent on the first syllable. "Ideas" is pronounced as a monosyllable; "Mans" as a dissyllable.—Mans.

C. P. D.—Shells may be polished by either hand labour or varnishing; in both cases all the rough parts must be well rubbed down with emery and water. If they are to be polished by hand (which is the best and most lasting way), after they have received two or three courses of emery, of different degrees of fineness, they must be finished with buff leather, dressed with rottenstone and oil.

H. S. R.—Oatmeal porridge is made by placing one cup of oatmeal in two quarts of boiling water, and salting to taste. Allow it to boil slowly for one hour or even longer, and eat with milk. A farina boiler is the best utensil in which to cook oat or Indian meal, as it does not require to be stirred constantly to keep from burning, as is the case when a single-bottomed vessel is used.

GEORGE B.—Perhaps you are naturally shy and uneasy while in the company of ladies—a feeling that will wear off if you associate with them to a greater extent than at present. Act naturally, giving no thought to your real or imaginary shortcomings, and we guarantee success in overcoming the bashfulness. The influence of a true woman would doubtless keep you from bad company.

L. S. D.—Any of the three following remedies applied to warts will be sure to remove them: nitrate of silver, nitric acid or aromatic vinegar. Touch the warts daily with either of these, and persevere in the treatment until a cure is effected. Sparks of electricity, repeated daily, by applying the warts to the conductor of an electrical machine, have been successfully employed as a cure for these unsightly and troublesome excrescences.

N. B. W.—1. To clean steel, make one ounce of soft soap and two ounces of emery-powder into a paste; rub it on the article with a piece of common camels leather, and a brilliant polish will be produced. 2. We cannot undertake to recommend any particular paper containing first-class stories for boys. 3. We cannot state which is the standard make of billiard balls.

B. S. J.—To enjoy a truly happy married life, the man and wife must not only respect and esteem, but also love each other. You say "I think I do not love him." If this is really the case, do not marry him simply because your deceased sister expressed a wish on her death-bed that you should do so. Marriage should not be looked upon in such a business-like manner, as it then becomes a mere matter of convenience, and as such totally devoid of all the tender sentiment inseparable from a contract based upon love. Then again, it does not seem likely he will propose for many months—perhaps years—to come, during which time your heart may learn to love him truly. The lapse of time has doubtless healed the wound inflicted on your heart by his jilting you. Therefore do not let that fact imbue you with the idea that he is in any way unworthy of your love at the present day.

JOCKEY.—Ophthalmia, or moon-blindness, in a horse is an obstinate disease to combat. It has been so called on account of some supposed influence of the moon, it occurring periodically, but that body cannot have anything to do with it. There are various causes assigned for this form of ophthalmia; among them dark and heated stable and the pungent gas escaping from them. It is also said to be in a high degree hereditary. The cloudiness with which the eye is affected is very singular in its nature. It will change in twenty-four hours from the thinnest film to the thickest opacity, and, as suddenly, the eye will nearly regain its perfect transparency, but only to lose it, and as rapidly, a second time. The services of a regular veterinary surgeon [are almost indispensable in a case of moon-blindness.

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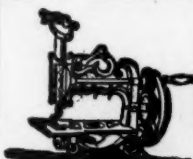
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